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RANCHO DEL MUERTO

By Charles King, Capt. U. S. Army.

And Other Stories of Adventure by Various Authors

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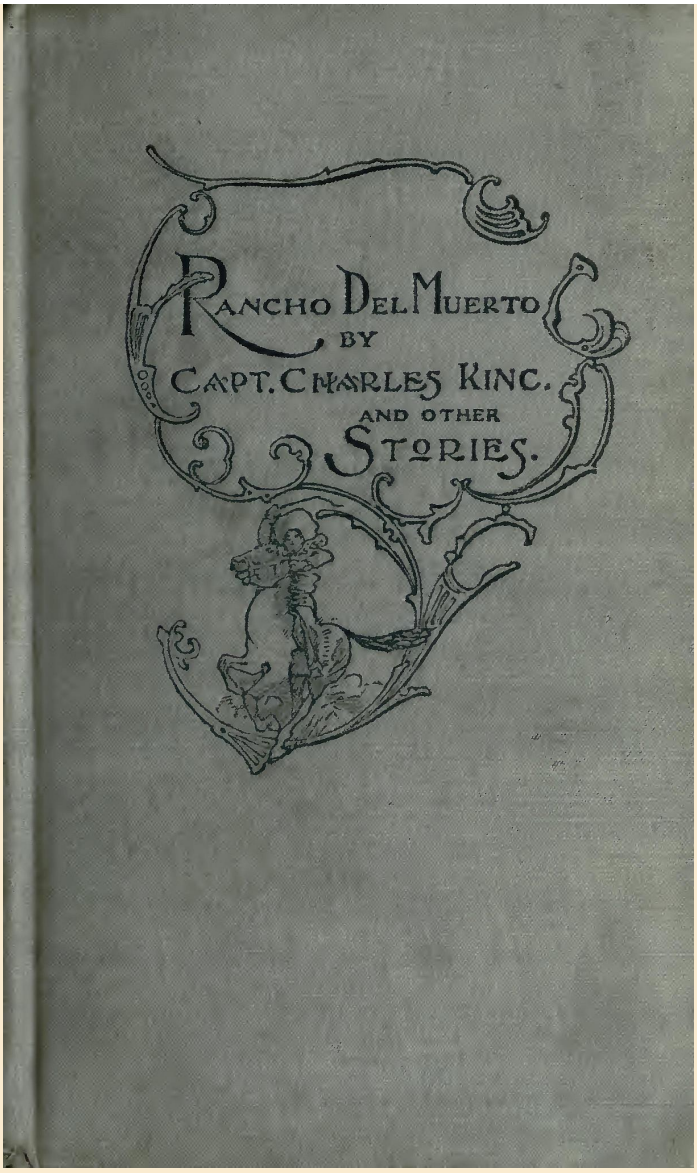
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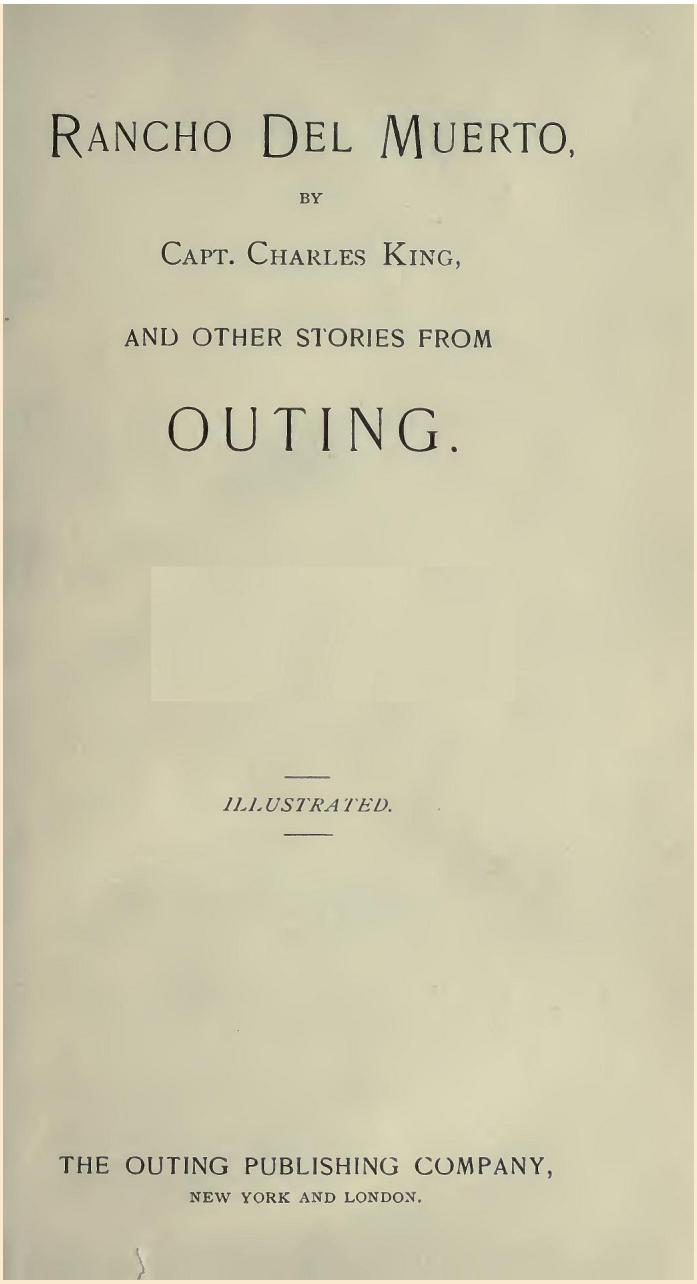

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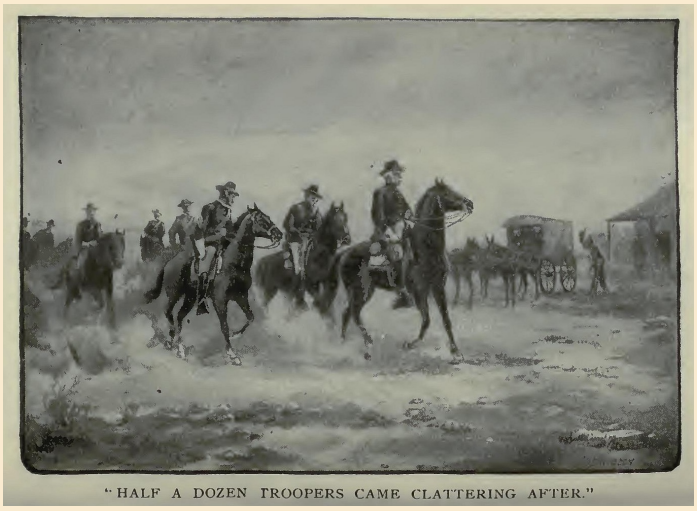
FIRST PART

O denying it—there was something uncanny about the place at the very first glance. The paymaster admitted that to himself as his ambulance slowly drove in, and his escort of half a dozen troopers came clattering after. It was his first visit to the spot, and he shrugged his broad shoulders and murmured a word of caution to the silent clerk who sat beside him:



"HALF A DOZEN TROOPERS CAME CLATTERING AFTER."

THE AMBULANCE SLOWLY DROVE IN.

“I want you to keep eyes and ears open here, Staines. We've got to make a night of it. You remember that this is where Sergeant Dinsmore was murdered, and I've heard nothing but bad accounts of the people for the last six months.”

Mr. Staines was apparently a man who wasted no words. Acquiescence with him may have been expressed by silence. At all events he made no reply.

“Were you ever at the ranch before, when you made the trips with Colonel Forte?” asked the paymaster.

“No, sir, it's—all strange to me hereabouts.”

“How far are we from Canyon del Muerto now, sergeant?” asked the officer of the bearded trooper who rode close alongside.

“Sixteen miles, sir, on a bee line, but at least twenty by the road. We're off the direct trail now. We could have got through the canyon and reached the camp before this if that mule hadn't gone lame.”

“Major,” said Staines in a low tone, “I can get a saddle horse or mule here, no doubt. Had I not better ride right on? I can reach Captain Rawlins' camp by 9 or 10 o'clock. He will be mighty anxious at your non-arrival.”

“I was thinking of sending one man ahead; I don't like to let you go. It will wear you out for to-morrow's work.”

“Indeed it won't, sir; I'm feeling fresh enough, and the change from wagon to saddle will just suit me. I think I'd better go.” And there was an eager look in Staines' clear-cut face.

“I'll think about it” was the dubious answer. “These cavalry men are the proper ones to send, not a paymaster's clerk. If anything befell you on the route I would be crippled in making payments.”

“Nothing would be apt to befall me, sir; I know that road well.”

“I thought you said all was strange to you hereabouts” said the paymaster quickly. But the clerk showed no discomfiture.

“I said here, around the ranch. The direct road lies off there nearly nine miles to the southwest, sir. That is the one we always took going to Tucson.”

The paymaster relapsed into silence. It is all very well to have subordinates who know far more than does the senior officer, yet the latter does not always find it agreeable. His own clerk having resigned some six months previous and returned to the East, when Major Sherrick was ordered from San Francisco to Arizona he had employed Mr. Staines at the urgent request of the officer whom he relieved. Staines had property interests in the Territory, he was told, and wanted to remain. He was a man profoundly versed in his duties; accurate, temperate, reliable and of unimpeachable character, said his recommenders. Sherrick was glad to get him, for he himself had no head for figures, and had been made a paymaster from civil life simply because his uncle the Senator found him a failure in every other capacity, and demanded the appointment of an Executive who could not deny him, though he felt like kicking himself when he looked at the long list of grizzled, war-tried captains who were wistful applicants for the longed-for promotion.

A tall Mexican stepped forward with much urbanity and grace of manner to assist the paymaster to alight

as the ambulance stopped in front of the ranch, and Major Sherrick looked with emotions of surprise upon Pedro Ruiz, the proprietor.

“You don't mean to say that's the scoundrel we heard so much bad talk about at headquarters?” he whispered to Staines at the first opportunity.

“The very same, sir; the most accomplished cutthroat in Arizona, if we can believe our senses and disregard evidence.”

“Where are his men? He seems alone here, all but that old greaser yonder.”

“Dios sabe,” answered the clerk briefly, though his eyes glanced quickly away toward the purpling range to the south. “But we shall need our guards every moment we are here, sir, that's certain.” An hour later night had settled down upon the broad valley, black and forbidding. All day long the wind had been sighing about the corral, whirling clouds of dust from the loose, sandy soil and sifting it in through many a chink and crevice over the floor of Pedro's ranch. The great ranges to the northwest, the Sierras to the south, were whitecapped at their lofty summits, but all over the arid miles of surrounding desert the sun had been hotly blazing from noon to the dewless eve, and not until it sank behind the western wave did the wind sweep down untempered. Through its shallow bed the Gila rolled, a lazy, turbid current, not a rifle shot away. Quicksands and muddy pools flanked its course for miles and barred all attempts at crossing except at the point where thrifty Pedro had “corduroyed” the flats with boards that had formerly done duty at the agency building, and, having originally cost the paternal Government something in the neighborhood of $1 apiece, had now come down to the base uses of daily trampling under foot. The stage to the Gripsack Mines, the huge ox teams and triple-hitched wagons, the nimble pack mules, even the buckboard with the United States mail, paid reluctant tribute into Pedro's dingy palm, though the owners mentally damned him for a thief.

Everybody in that part of Arizona well knew that in the unprecedented rise of the Gila, a few years back, two of the agency storehouses had been floated away down the stream, accompanied by a dense flotilla of joists, scantling and clapboards, which had been piled up on the river bank after weeks of laborious transportation from Plummer's saw mill in the San Gabriel. So, too, had sundry casks of bacon, barrels of beans and bales of Indian goods; and while portions of this flood-swept assortment were found stranded and scattered along the winding shores as far down as Pedro's bailiwick, not so much as a solitary shingle had passed beyond, and the laws of flotsam and jetsam had received at the hands of this shrewd “greaser” their most liberal construction. More than once had the Federal authorities been compelled to proceed to stringent measures with Pedro and arraign him before a jury of his peers on charges of having robbed and defrauded the General Government, and more than once with prompt and cheering unanimity had the jury pronounced him not guilty, a service which he never failed to requite in kind when Garcia, Gomez or Sancho came up for his turn. And now the old Mexican was proprietor of a goodly ranch, built mainly of adobe, it is true, as were his roomy corrals and storehouses, yet roofed, floored, partitioned, doored and menu for either breakfast, dinner or supper, at a charge of $1 a head for any and all travelers who sought to appease their appetite at his table. He kept a bar, too, and dealt out villainous “tanglefoot” and windowed, too, by the unwilling contributions wrung from Uncle Sam.

For three years he had furnished bacon, *frijoles* and fried eggs, the unvarying fiery mescal to such stomachs as could stand the onslaught and the tax of two bits a thimbleful. He ran a “brace game” of monte whenever the packers were drunk or strangers fool enough to play. He was a thorough-paced rascal in the opinion of every “gringo” who passed that way, and a man of unimpeachable character according to all records in the case. He was a “greaser” of whom everything had been said and nothing proved; that is, to the satisfaction of an old-time Arizona jury. But Mr. Whitlock, the new United States District Attorney, was said to be “laying” for Pedro, and between those who knew them both and were aware of the possibilities of finding twelve better men and truer outside of Maricopa County, bets were even as to the result.

"IT IS NOT TRUE. YOU LIE!"

"Just let me get that thieving greaser across the line into Yavapai," said a local luminary, "and I'll find a jury that will hang him on sight or lynch him on general principles." But Pedro knew better than to venture northward along the tempting shores of the Hassayampa. Even the chance of collecting a bad debt from a fellow countryman, known to be lurking in Wickenburg, failed to lure Pedro thither. He smiled suggestively, showing his white teeth and waving aside the blue smoke of his cigarrito with sinewy brown hand. "A—Wickenburg is too damn close to Yavapai, and Yavapai to 'ell," he remarked. And it had more than once been said of Pedro that he spoke English like a native.

"Rancho Ruiz" was the sonorous and pretentious title he had bestowed upon the establishment to which the winding Arizona roadway led. "Cutthroat Crossing" was what the soldiers and placer miners had called this half ferry, half ford of Pedro's ever since the body of young Sergeant Dinsmore had been found stranded on a sand bar of the Gila two miles below,' his neck and his money belt slashed by the same knife. Going into Yuma with well-lined pockets, Dinsmore had been warned to make no stay among the gang of monte players always hovering about Pedro's. But he had been a bold and successful gambler at Tucson. He had nothing but contempt for Mexican bravos and confidence in his own prowess as a shot. The card table had attractions he could not well resist, but the ranch had still another—Pedro's daughter.

Now it was when he was sent thither with a squad of a dozen troopers, hunting up the missing sergeant, that Lieutenant Adriance caught sight of this siren of a senorita. She could not have been more than seventeen, and her mother would have denied her even that number of years. "She is a mere child," protested Senora Dolores, when the subject was mentioned. Pedro had moved up from Sonora only a few years before, and had lived a while at the old Mexico-Spanish town of Tucson, whither, ere long, there came unflattering tales as to the cause of his change of residence. He had money, and that in Arizona covered more sins than charity. The boundary line lay conveniently near. Extradition was an unpracticed art in the days whereof we write. Apaches of the mountains and assassins of the mines found equal refuge across the border, and in exchange we received such choice spirits as proved too tough for even a Mexican town to tolerate. Of such was Pedro; but no one to look at Pedro's daughter would have called her a felon's child.

The night that Adriance reached the rancho on the search just mentioned he had purposely left his little escort some distance up the Gila, and advanced alone to reconnoitre. It was a perfectly still evening, soft and starry. The hoofs of his broncho made no sound upon the sandy waste of road, and not even the dogs about the corral seemed aware of his coming. Adriance had thrice visited the ranch before, when returning from scout or pursuit of Apaches, and never once had he been greeted by feminine voice about the premises. It was with no little surprise, then, that he heard the tinkle of a guitar and the sound of low, soft, girlish tones singing a plaintive melody. He had heard many a Mexican ditty, and had pronounced the singers twangy, shrill and nasal; but this was different. He had come to Rancho Ruiz with every expectation of finding evidence of the murder of one of his most valued troopers, and here, on the instant of his arrival, was disarmed by a song. East of the ranch there stood a little lattice-work structure, something after the manner of a summer house, and from thence the sounds proceeded. The lieutenant leaped from his horse and strode to the entrance, wondering what manner of woman he should find beyond. There was not light enough to distinguish either form or feature, but over in the farther corner was a shadowy something in white. The song

continued but a moment before the singer became aware of the equally shadowy form at the entrance, and stopped abruptly.

“Leon!” spoke a girlish voice in the Spanish tongue, “you frightened me. Is that you?”

“I am Felipe, otherwise Phil. Adriance, of the American Cavalry, senorita, and far more surprised than you are at seeing me.”

The girl started to her feet as though flight was her first impulse, then hesitated. Did not the “Senor Teniente” bar the way in merely standing in the entrance?

“Do not be alarmed, I beg of you,” implored the young officer, “it is so long since I have heard a song in a woman's voice. It is such a surprise to hear one now. Do sing for me again. I will have to stand here where I can hold my horse.”

For a moment she was silent, then: “You have been to the rancho? You have seen my father?” she asked at length, her voice tremulous and almost inaudible.

“I? No, I have just come; I am alone, and heard your song and forgot everything else.”

To his surprise she came hurriedly forward out of the dusk, and stood close to his side, looking fearfully over toward the night lights at the bar, whence the sounds of Mexican voices could be heard.

“Alone? You came here alone? O senor, ride on or ride back. Stay not here! Not at the rancho! There are wicked men—not my father; not Pedro Ruiz, but—there are others.”

“Is this true? Are you Pedro's daughter?” queried the lieutenant, evidently far more impressed with this fact than with her tidings. “I never knew he had a child like you, and I have been here often and have never seen you.”

“But I—have seen you, senor, when you were last here, and I saw you, too, at the *cuartel* at Tucson. Do you know—do you remember the day of the race?” And her dark eyes were for one instant lifted timidly to his.

“Is this possible?” he exclaimed, seizing her hand as it fell listlessly by her side. “Let me see your face. Surely I have heard your voice before.” But she shrank back, half timid, half capricious.

“I must not; I must go, senor, and you—you must ride away.”

And now her eyes glanced half fearfully toward the house, then sought his face in genuine anxiety. He had been fumbling in the pocket of his hunting shirt, and suddenly drew forth a little silver case. The next instant, while he held her wrist firmly with one hand, the brilliant flame of an electric match flashed over her face and form.

“THIS IS MADNESS! PUT IT OUT!”

“Oh, senor,” she cried, even when bowing her blushing face upon her bared arm, “this is madness! Put it out!” Then, like a frightened deer, she went bounding to the ranch, but not before he had recognized in her the pretty Mexican girl with whom he had thrice danced at the *festa* at Tucson and whose name he had vainly sought to learn. Nor did he again see her on this visit. Nor did he hear again her voice. Returning with his men at dawn, he began the day's investigations and had occasion to ask many questions of old Pedro, who promptly answered that he well remembered the sergeant and that the sergeant had drunk at his bar; had partaken of his cheer; had stabled his horse at the corral; but that, after gambling with “los otros,” men of whom he, Pedro, knew naught, the sergeant had gone on his way. More he could not tell. He shrugged his shoulders and protested his ignorance even of the names of the men with whom Dinsmore had gambled.

“You enter my house, Senor Teniente. You ask for food, for drink. You pay. You go. Ask I you your name—your home? No! Should I demand it of any caballero who so come and go?”

And failing in extracting information from the master, Adriance sought the hirelings and found them equally reticent. Shrewd frontiersmen and campaigners in his little detachment were equally unsuccessful until nearly night, when a brace of prospectors rode in and said they saw what looked to be a human body over on a sand bar down the Gila. Then Pedro's face had turned ashen gray, and one of his henchmen trembled violently.

Poor Dinsmore was given such soldier burial as his comrades could devise, and Pedro, of his own accord, and with much reverential gravity of mien, had graced the ceremony with his presence.

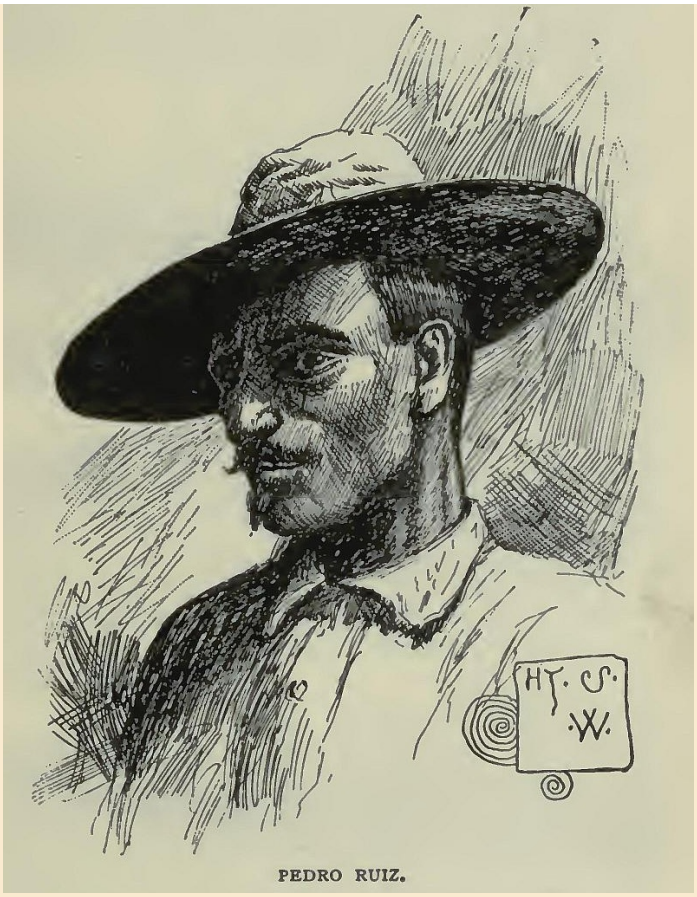
Every man of the cavalry detachment felt morally certain that Pedro Ruiz knew far more than he would tell, but there was no way in which they could proceed farther, and civil process was ineffectual in those days except in the court of final jurisdiction of which Judge Lynch was sole presiding officer.

Adriance rode away with a distinct sense of discomfiture at heart. What business had he to feel baffled and chagrined at his failure to see that girl again when the original object of his mission had been the discovery of Dinsmore's fate? What right had he to wish to speak with the daughter of the man whom he believed an accessory to the sergeant's murder? “Do not let them know you have seen me” she had whispered ere she scurried away to the ranch, and as neither mother nor daughter once appeared during the presence of his escort about the corral, there seemed no way in which he could open the subject.

Six months passed, during which period he had been sent to Tucson on escort duty, and while there had sought and found some well-to-do Mexican residents whom he remembered as being friends of the graceful girl who had danced so delightfully with him at the *baile* only the year before. From them he learned her name, Isabel, and something of her history. And the very next scout down the Gila found him in command and eager to go, and this very night, black and forbidding, that had settled down on Rancho Ruiz after the arrival of Paymaster Sherrick and his train, who should come riding noiselessly through the gloaming but Lieutenant Adriance himself, as before, all alone.

Nearing the lights of the rancho and moving at slow and cautious walk, his ears alert for every sound, the lieutenant became aware of the fact that Roderick, his pet horse, was pricking up his own ears and showing vast interest in some mysterious and unseen presence which they were steadily approaching. Before he had got within two hundred yards of the dim light of the house he caught sight of a lantern or two flitting about the corral. Then Roderick quickened his nimble walk and began edging off to the right front, where presently, against the low western sky, Adriance could distinguish some object like a big covered wagon, and plainly heard the pawing and snorting of a horse. Roderick evidently wanted to answer, but the lieutenant reined him abruptly to the left, and veered away southward.

Just now it was not the society of his fellow men he sought. A woman's voice, one woman's at least, would have called him eagerly forward from the darkness into the light of her waiting eyes. As it was, he made wide circuit, and not until well to the south did he again approach the silent walls of the corral. And now the wind, blowing toward him, brought with it the sound of voices, and Adriance was suddenly warned that someone was here, close at hand. Dismounting, the lieutenant slowly led his horse toward the dark barrier before him, but not until he had softly traversed the length of the southern wall did he become aware of other voices, low toned and eager. Around the corner, on the western side, the dark forms of a horseman and someone afoot were dimly defined, then a brief conversation became audible:



PEDRO RUIZ.

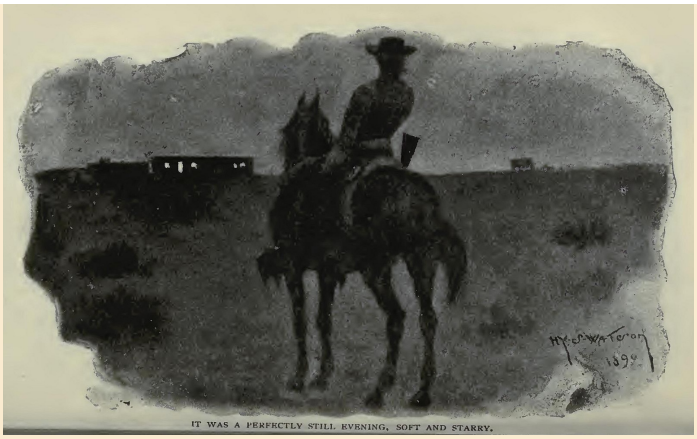
"GO SOFTLY UNTIL YOU ARE A MILE AWAY."

"You have no time to lose, Leon. Go softly until you are a mile away, then ride like hell.

"I understand, but the money?"

"That shall be yours to-morrow—now skip."

The jingle of a Mexican spur, the soft thud of mustang hoofs upon the yielding soil were heard a moment, and the horseman rode slowly away southwestward, the broad stiff brim of his sombrero revealed against the starry sky; then all was silence. The American, whoever he was, still stood there. Adriance felt sure he had heard the voice before. As for the horseman—Leon—that was the name he heard her speak the night he surprised her in the little summer house. Who was Leon?



IT WAS A PERFECTLY STILL EVENING, SOFT AND STARRY.

Presently the American turned and strolled slowly back toward the rancho. Slipping Roderick's rein over the post at the angle, the lieutenant followed. Keeping close to the wall, the stranger led the way, all unconscious of pursuit or observation, yet when he reached the next corner, whence could be seen the night lights of the rancho and the far-away gleam of the camp fire, out toward the Gila, he stopped and peered cautiously around.

Mindful of the evil fame that hung about the premises, Adriance halted too and waited. The next moment his heart beat hard. A woman's voice—soft, silvery and young—had accosted the stranger. It was Isabel's.

“You have sent my brother away again, when he had but just returned. Why is this, senor? Whither has he gone?”

“Never mind about Leon, Belita,” said the American, soothingly, “he's all right. He has simply ridden over to let Captain Rawlins know of our mishap.”

“It is not true, senor! I heard him speak to my father. It is to Sancho and to Manuel he rides, and for no good. To what new crime do you lead him? Why are they all gone? Why are we alone here this night? Why ——”

“Don't be a fool, girl,” said the man curtly, as he took her by the wrist. “Come, Leon's gone. Come back to the house.”

“He has not gone. He promised me he would not go from me without a word to-night. The moment I saw you I knew that trouble would come, and I warned him when he returned. You have made him wicked—you Americanos. You are all——'

“Oh, yes, all, even Teniente Adriance, Isabel. I heard all about you and your affair with him. Have a care!”

“No. He is good. It is not in him to make a gambler and a rover of my brother.”

“He would make worse of your brother's sister, you fool,” the man muttered, with brutal emphasis. “Come now, no nonsense with that fellow; he's as good as married already, I tell you; he is to be married in two months.”

“Oh, it is not true!” was the fiery answer. “You lie!” And then, with feminine inconsequence, “Who is she? Who does he marry?”

“The Senorita Abert—a lovely girl, too, and rich—in San Francisco.”

“Yes, it is a lie, Staines, and you know it!” came in cool and measured tones, and Mr. Adriance suddenly stepped from the corner of the wall.

Staines dropped the captive's hand and recoiled a pace or two with a stifled exclamation, half amaze, half dismay; then with sudden effort strove to recover himself. “Well,” he exclaimed, with a nervous laugh; “talk of angels and you hear the rustle, etc. Indeed, lieutenant, I beg your pardon, though; I was merely joking with our little Mexican friend.”

“That will do, Mr. Staines; I know a joke when I hear one. Wait here a moment, if you please, for I want a word with you. Pardon me for startling you, senorita. Will you take my arm?”

The girl was trembling violently. With bowed head and fluttering heart she leaned upon the trooper's arm and was slowly led away toward the rancho, never seeming to note that the little brown hand that had been so firmly taken and drawn within by his was still tightly clasped by that cavalry gauntlet. The moment they were out of the earshot of Staines the lieutenant bent down.

“It was to see you I came here, Isabel; I had hoped to find you at the summer house. Come to me there in ten minutes, will you? I must see you before I go. First, though, I have to investigate that fellow Staines.”

“Oh, I cannot! I dare not! I slipped away from my room because of Leon. They will lead him into trouble again. Indeed, I must go back. I must go, Senor Felipe.”

“You remember my name, then, little one!” he laughed, delightedly. “I have been to Tucson since I saw you that blessed night, and I heard all about you.”

“Hush, senor! It is my mother who calls. List! Let me go, sefior!” for his arm had suddenly stolen about her waist. “Promise you will come—promise!”

“I dare not! O Felipe, no!” she cried, for he had with quick impulse folded her tightly in his strong embrace and his lips were seeking hers. Struggling to avoid them she had hidden her face upon his breast.

“Promise—quick!” he whispered.

“Ah, if I can—yes. Now let me go.” His firm hand turned her glowing face to his; his eager lips pressed one lingering kiss just at the corner of her pretty mouth. She hurled herself from him then and bounded into the

darkness. An instant more and he heard the latch of the rear door click; a stream of light shot out toward the corral and she was gone. Then slowly he returned to the corner of the wall, fully expecting that Staines had left. To his surprise, there was the clerk composedly awaiting him.

“Where have you sent Leon Ruiz?” was the stern question.

“I do not recognize your right to speak to me in that tone, Mr. Adriance. If you have nothing else to ask me—good night!”

“By God, sir! I heard your whispered talk with him and I know there is mischief afoot,” said the lieutenant, as he strode after the retreating form. “This thing has got to be explained, and in the major's presence.”

Staines halted, and lifting his hat with Castilian grace of manner bowed profoundly to the angry officer. “Permit me, sir, to conduct you to him.”

An hour later, baffled, puzzled, balked in his precious hopes, Mr. Adriance returned to the bivouac of his little command. Major Sherrick had promptly and fully confirmed the statement of his clerk. It was he who told Mr. Staines to employ a ranchman to ride by night to Captain Rawlins, and the mysterious caution that surrounded the proceedings was explained by the fact that Pedro had refused his permission and that Leon had to be bribed to disobey the paternal order. Adriance was dissatisfied and suspicious, but what was there left for him to say?

Then he had hastened to the summer house, and waited a whole hour, but there came no Isabel. It was nearly 10 o'clock when he turned his horse over to the care of the guard in a little clump of cottonwoods near the Gila.

“We remain here to-morrow,” he briefly told the sergeant. “No need to wake the men before 6.” With that he went to the little wall tent, pitched for his use some yards away.

How long he slumbered Adriance could not tell. Ill at ease as to the strange conduct of Staines, he had not slept well. Conscience, too, was smiting him. Something in the tones of that girlish voice thrilled and quivered through his memory. What right had he even to ask her to meet him? What wrong had he not wrought in that one kiss?

Somebody was fumbling at the fastening of the tent flap.

“What is wanted, sergeant?” he quickly hailed.

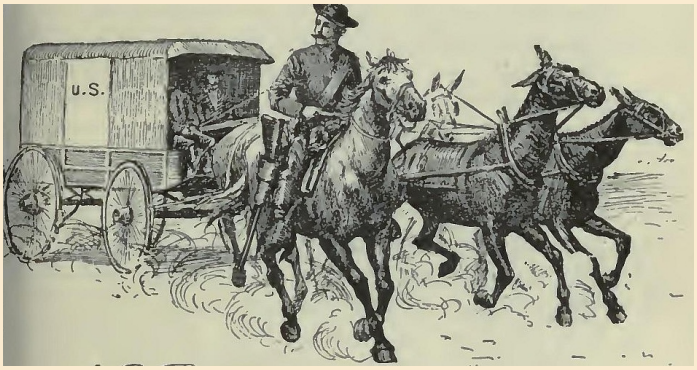
“Open, quick!” was the low-toned answer. “Come to the door. No, no, bring no light,” was the breathless caution, as he struck a match.

“Who is this?” he demanded, with strange thrill at heart—something in those tones he well knew—yet it could not be. A dim figure in shrouding *serape* was crouching at the front tent pole as he threw open the flap.

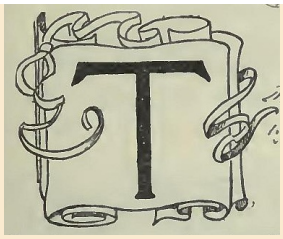
“Good God! Isabel!”

“Si—— Yes. Hush, senor, no one must hear, no one must know 'twas I. Quick! Wake your men! Saddle! Ride hard till you catch the paymaster! Never leave him till you are beyond Canyon del Muerto, and then never come to the rancho again—never!”

SECOND CHAPTER



HAT off mule of the paymaster's ambulance been a quadruped of wonderful recuperative powers. She had gone nearly dead lame all the previous day, and now at 5 o'clock on this breezy morning was trotting along as though she had never known a twinge in her life. Mr. Staines was apparently nonplussed. Acting on his advice, the paymaster had decided to break camp soon after 2 o'clock, make coffee, and then start for



Rawlins' camp at once. He confidently expected to have to drag along at a slow walk, and his idea was to get well through the Canyon del Muerto before the heat of the day. The unexpected recovery of Jenny, however, enabled them to go bowling ahead over the level flat, and at sunrise they were already in sight of the northern entrance to the gorge. It was odd how early Mr. Staines began to develop lively interest in the condition of that mule. First he suggested to the driver that he was going too fast, and would bring on that lameness again; but the driver replied that it was Jenny herself who was doing most of the pulling. Then Staines became fearful lest the cavalry escort should get exhausted by such steady trotting, and ventured to say to Major Sherrick that they ought to rein up on their account. Sherrick was eager to push ahead, and, like most other men not to the manner born, never for a moment thought of such a thing as a horse's getting used up by simply carrying a man-at-arms six hours at ceaseless trot or lope. However, he knew that Staines was far more experienced in such matters than he, and so could not disregard his advice.


ISABEL.

"How is it, sergeant, are we going too fast for you?" he asked.

"Not a bit of it, sir," was the cheery answer.

"We're glad enough to go lively now and rest all day in the shade."

"You see how it is, Staines; they don't want to slack up speed. We'll get to Rawlins' in time for breakfast at this rate," and again Staines was silent. Presently the team began the ascent of a rolling wave of foothill, around which the roadway twisted as only Arizona roadways can, and at the crest the driver reined in to give his mules a "breather." Staines leaped from the ambulance for a stretch. The troopers promptly dismounted and loosened saddle girths.

"Yonder is the mouth of the Canyon, sir," said the sergeant, pointing to a rift in the range to the south, now gorgeously lighted up by the morning sunshine.

"How long is the defile, sergeant?"

"Not more than four miles, sir—that is, the Canyon itself—but it is crooked as a ram's horn, and the approach on the other side is a long, winding valley."

"When were you there last?" asked Staines.

"About six months ago, just after Dins-more was murdered."

Staines turned quickly away and strolled back a few yards along the road.

"You knew Dinsmore, then?" asked the paymaster.

"I knew him well, sir. We had served together during the war. They said he fell in love with a pretty Mexican girl at Tucson, and she would not listen to him. Some of the men heard that she was a daughter of old Pedro who keeps that ranch, and that it was hoping to see her that he went there."

"I know. I remember hearing about it all then," said the paymaster. "Did you ever see anything of the man who was said to have killed him?"

"Sonora Bill? No, sir; and I don't know anyone who ever did. He was always spoken of as the chief of a gang of cutthroats and stage robbers down around Tucson. They used to masquerade as Apaches sometimes—that's the way they were never caught. The time they robbed Colonel Wood and killed his clerk 'I' troop was scouting not ten miles away, and blessed if some of the very gang didn't gallop to Lieutenant Breese and swear the Apaches had attacked their camp here in Canyon del Muerto, so that when the lieutenant was wanted to chase the thieves his troop couldn't be found anywhere—he was 'way up here hunting for Apaches in the Maricopa range. The queer thing about that gang was that they always knew just when a paymaster's outfit or a Government officer with funds would be along. It was those fellows that robbed Major Rounds, the quartermaster, and jumped the stage when Lieutenant Spaulding and his wife were aboard. She had beautiful diamonds that they were after, but the lieutenant fooled them—he had them sent by express two days afterward."

Mr. Staines came back toward the ambulance at this moment, took a field glass from its case, and retraced his steps along the road some twenty yards. Here he adjusted the glass and looked long toward the northeast.

"All ready to start, sir," said the driver.

The major swung himself up to his seat; the troopers quietly "sinched" their saddles and mounted, and still the clerk stood there absorbed.

"Come, Staines!" shouted the paymaster, impatiently, "we're waiting for you." And still he did not move. The sergeant whirled his horse about and clattered back to where he stood.

"Come, sir, the major's waiting." Staines turned abruptly and, silent as ever, hurried to the wagon.

"What were you staring at so long?" said the paymaster, pettishly, as his assistant clambered in. "I shouted two or three times."

Staines' face was pale, yet there were drops of sweat upon his brow.

"I thought I saw a party of horsemen out there on the flats."

"The devil!" said the paymaster, with sudden interest. "Where? Let me look."

"You can't see now, sir. Even the dust cloud is gone. They are behind that low ridge some eight or ten miles out there in the valley."

"Go on, driver, it's only cattle from the ranch or something of that kind. I didn't know, by the way you looked and spoke, but that it might be some of Sonora Bill's gang."

"Hardly, sir; they haven't been heard of for a year, and once away from Pedro's we are safe enough anyhow."

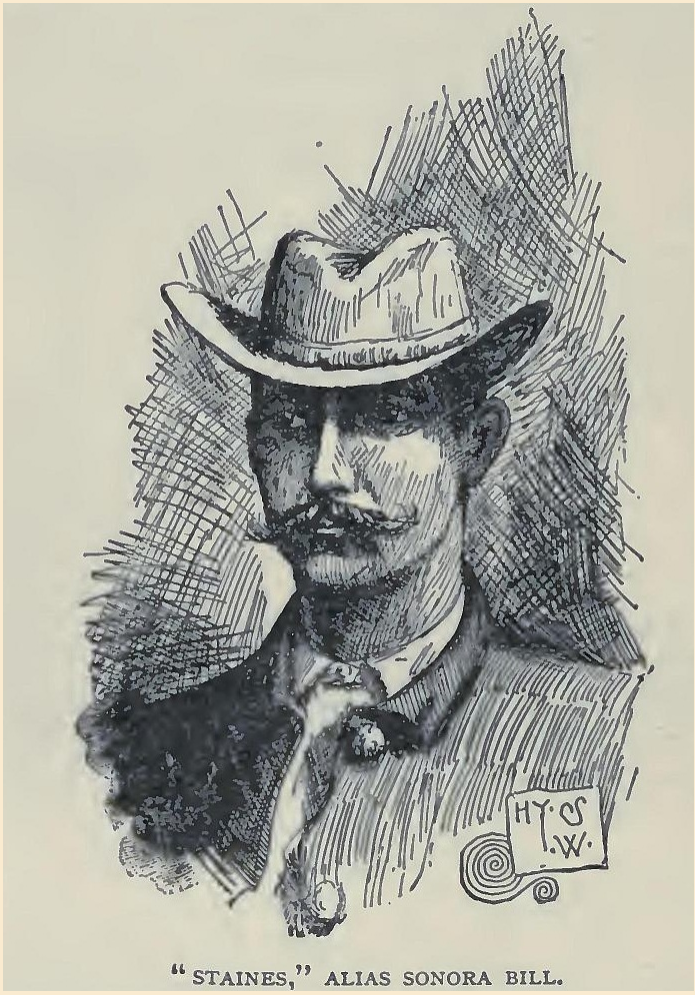
Half an hour later the four-mule team was winding slowly up a rocky path. On both sides the heights were

steep, covered with a thick undergrowth of scrub oak and juniper. Here and there rocky cliffs jutted out from the hillside and stood like sentinels along the way. The sergeant, with one trooper, rode some distance ahead, their carbines “advanced” and ready for use, for Edwards was an old campaigner, and, though he thought it far from probable that any outlaws would be fools enough to attempt to “get away with” a paymaster's bank when he and his five men were the guardians and Captain Rawlins with his whole troop was but a short distance away, he had learned the lesson of precaution. Major Sherrick, with his iron safe under his own seat, grasped a rifle in both hands. The driver was whistling softly to himself and glancing attentively ahead, for there was a continuous outcrop of boulders all along the road. The remaining troopers, four in number, rode close behind or alongside the wagon.

Presently they reached a point where, after turning a precipitous ledge of rock, glistening in the morning sunshine, they saw before them a somewhat steep incline. Here, without a word, Staines swung lightly from the vehicle and trudged for a moment alongside; then he stooped to adjust his boot lace, and when Sherrick looked back the clerk was coming jauntily after them, only a dozen paces in rear. In this order they pushed ahead perhaps a hundred yards farther, moving slowly up the defile, and Staines could easily have regained his distance, but for some reason failed to do so. Suddenly, and for no apparent cause, Jenny and her mate shied violently, swerved completely around and were tangled up with the wheel team before the driver could use the lash. Even his ready blasphemy failed to straighten things out.

“Look out for those rocks up there on the right!” he shouted. “Grab their heads, Billy!”

Even as he spoke the rocky walls of the Canyon resounded with the crash of a score of firearms. The driver, with a convulsive gasp, toppled forward out of his seat, his hand still clinching the reins. One of the troopers clapped his hand to his forehead, his reins falling useless upon his horse's neck, and reeled in the saddle as his charger whirled about and rushed, snorting with fright, down the narrow road. At the instant of the firing the sound of a dozen “spats” told where the leaden missiles had torn through the stiff canvas cover of the ambulance; and Sherrick, with blanched face, leaped from the riddled vehicle and plunged heavily forward upon his hands and knees. Two of the troopers sprang from their saddles, and, crouching behind a boulder across the road, opened fire up the opposite hillside. The sergeant and his comrade, bending low over their horses' necks, came thundering back down the Canyon, just in time to see the mules whirl about so suddenly as to throw the ambulance on its side. The iron safe was hurled into the shallow ditch; the wagon bed dragged across the prostrate form of the paymaster, rolling him over and over half a dozen times, and then, with a wreck of canvas, splinters, chains and traces clattering at their heels, the four mules went rattling away down the gorge.



“STAINES,” ALIAS SONORA BILL.

“Jump for shelter, men!” shouted Sergeant Edwards, as he dragged the senseless form of the major under the great ledge to the right. “Stand them off as long as you can! Come out of your holes, you cowardly hounds!” he roared, shaking his fist at the smoke-wreathed rocks up the heights. “Come out and fight fair!

There's only five of us left!”

Here in the road lay the major, bleeding from cuts and bruises, with every breath knocked out of his battered body; yonder, his hands 'clinched in the death agony, the stiffening form of the driver—plucky to the last. Twenty yards away down the road, all in a heap, lay one poor soldier shot through the head, and now past praying for. One of the others was bleeding from a gash along the cheek where a bullet had zipped its way, and Edwards shouted in vain for Staines to join them; the clerk had disappeared. For full five minutes the desperate combat was maintained; the sergeant and his little squad crouching behind the nearest rocks and firing whenever head or sombrero showed itself along the heights. Then came shots from the rear, and another poor fellow was laid low, and Edwards realized, to his despair, that the bandits were on every side, and the result only a question of time.

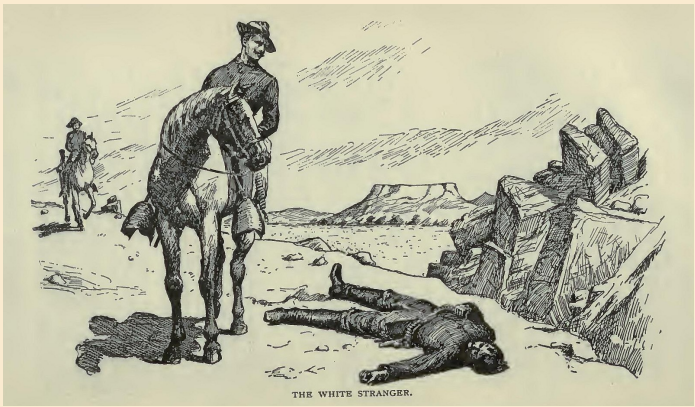
And then—then, there came a thunder of hoof beats, a storm of ringing cheers, a rush and whirl of panting, foaming steeds and a score of sunburnt, stalwart troopers racing in the lead of a tall young soldier, whose voice rang clear above the tumult: “Dismount! Up the rocks, men! Lively now!” And, springing from his own steed, leaping catlike from rock to rock, Phil Adriance went tearing up the heights, his soldiers at his heels. Edwards and his unwounded men seized and held the trembling horses; Sherrick feebly crawled to his precious safe and fell across it, his arms clasping about his iron charge. For five minutes more there was a clamor of shots and shouts, once in a while a wild Mexican shriek for mercy, all the tumult gradually receding in the distance, and at last—silence. Then two men came down the bluffs, half bearing between them the limp form of their young leader. The lieutenant was shot through both thighs and was faint from loss of blood.

“Has no one a little whiskey?” asked Corporal Watts.

“Here you are” was the answer. And Mr. Staines, with very white face, stepped down from behind the ledge and held out his flask.

A week later the lieutenant lay convalescing at Rawlins' camp. A vigorous constitution and the healthful, bracing, open-air life he had led for several years, either in the saddle or tramping over the mountains, had enabled him to triumph speedily over such minor ills as flesh wounds, even though the loss of blood had been very great. The young soldier was soon able to give full particulars of his chase, and to one man alone, Rawlins, the secret of its inspiration.

Most important had been the results. It was evident to everyone who examined the ground—and Rawlins had scoured the range with one platoon of his troop that very afternoon after the fight, while his lieutenant, Mr. Lane, was chasing the fugitives with another—that a band of at least twenty outlaws had been concealed among the rocks of Canyon del Muerto for two or three days, evidently for the purpose of waylaying the escort of the paymaster when he came along. Their horses had been concealed half a mile away in a deep ravine, and it was in trying to escape to them that they had sustained their losses. Five of their number were shot down in full flight by Adri-ance's men, and, could they have caught the others, no quarter would have been given, for the men were infuriated by the sight of the havoc the robbers had wrought, and by the shooting of their favorite officer.



THE WHITE STRANGER.

No papers had been found on the bodies; nothing, in fact, to identify them with any band. All, with one exception, were Mexicans; he was a white man whom none of the troopers could identify, though Corporal Watts, of Troop B, declared he had seen him at “Cutthroat Crossing” the last time he went through there on escort duty. The others, whoever they were, rode in a body until they got around the range to the southward, then seemed to scatter over the face of the earth. Some odd things had transpired, over which Rawlins pondered not a little. It was Corporal Watts who brought to his camp at 11 o'clock the news of the desperate attempt to murder and rob the paymaster, and as they rode back together the corporal gave the captain such information as lay in his power. Lieutenant Adriance had “routed out” the detachment just at daybreak, when it was still dark, and saddling with the utmost haste had led away across country for the canyon, leaving the pack mules and a small guard at camp. “We rode like the wind,” said Watts, “after the first few miles, and every man seemed to know just what to expect when at last we struck the road and saw the trail of the ambulance and escort. We got there just in the nick of time.”

When Sherrick—who though severely battered and bruised had no bones broken—was able to talk at all, he never could say enough in praise of Adriance and his men; but what he wanted to know was how they came to learn of the threatened danger. Captain Rawlins protested that it was “past finding out.” The major questioned the men, but without success, and as for Staines, it was remarked that his pertinacity in cross-examination was simply wonderful. For some reason, however, the men of B troop did not like the fellow and

would have little to do with him. But up to the time that Major Sherrick was able to push ahead for Tucson it is certain that he had discovered nothing as to the source of the lieutenant's information; neither had they heard of Leon Ruiz, the night messenger. Staines opined that he must have been intercepted by the bandits, perhaps killed by them, when it was found that he was the bearer of a message to Captain Rawlins. After a brief chat with the lieutenant himself, one which the doctor did not interdict, the old troop commander sent a trusty sergeant with six men to scout the neighborhood of the rancho.

Lieutenant Lane was detached to take command of Adriance's troop, which was sent on its way forthwith, leaving the gloomy rancho alone to sentinel the Gila crossing. But the moment Sherrick and his silent clerk drove on toward Tucson the old captain said a few words of farewell to the invalid, left him in the doctor's charge and rode away northward on the trail of his sergeant. That night he rapped for admission and ordered supper at Rancho Ruiz, while his men, strolling about the premises, took careful note of the three or four scowling “greasers” who infested the corral.

Adriance was sitting up and beginning to hobble around when Rawlins returned to camp during the week that followed, and was all eagerness to hear what tidings the captain had to tell. But Rawlins had little to say; he had seen Pedro and had had one glimpse of Senora Dolores, but not so much as a word with the senorita; she was kept carefully concealed. Within the month Adriance was quite well enough to travel to his station, but refused. He would remain here, he said, until able to relieve Lane of the command of his troop and continue the scouting work. He did not wish to go to the fort. Sherrick and his clerk had come back in the course of a fortnight, and Mr. Staines asked to see Lieutenant Adriance, but that gentleman refused—a matter which caused the clerk to “bite his lips and look queer,” reported the soldier who took the message, but he said nothing at all.

Ten days afterward a Prescott paper mentioned the fact that Mr. Albert G. Staines, so long and favorably known in this Territory, had dropped in to look over valuable mining properties in the Big Bug and Hassayampa districts; and this Rawlins silently showed to Adriance.

“Then you may be sure he'll come down to the rancho, and in less than no time,” said Adriance, “and I must go.” Rawlins made no reply at first, then he rose and nervously paced the floor a moment and turned upon his junior.

“Philip, I say no!”

The color mounted to the lieutenant's

“Why not?”

“Ask yourself; ask your conscience, Adriance. You have told her that he, Staines, was a liar. You have virtually told her that you were engaged to no woman. You have inspired a sentiment, perhaps a passion, in that young girl's heart, and you're going there to defend her—a thing that I can do much better than you, now that you are a cripple. Then, think, my boy, I have known you six years; I have never known you to say or do a mean or unmanly thing. I'm an old fogy—an old fool perhaps—but I like to think most women pure and some men honest. You are one of them, Phil.” There was a moment's silence.

“And yet you think I mean her harm.”

“Not yet, Philip, but would you marry that old scoundrel's daughter?”

Adriance had no answer.

“Philip, if you look into that girl's eyes again, unless it be to ask her to be your wife, I shall lose my faith in manly honor.”

Two days afterward Rawlins rode away on duty. A strange unrest had possessed the lieutenant since that brief talk with this old Puritan of a captain. Not another word had been said upon the subject, but every syllable that Rawlins spoke had struck home. Adriance respected and honored the grim, duty-loving troop commander whom some of the youngsters openly laughed at and referred to as “Praise the Lord Barebones” and “Captain Roundhead,” but the lieutenant well knew that no braver soldier, no “squar-er” captain drew sabre in the whole regiment than this faithful friend, who had long since singled him out for many an unusual kindness. He knew more—that in his high standard of honor and rectitude old Rawlins had said nothing which was not just and true.

Adriance knew well that he ought not to again seek that young girl's presence, and the blood rushed hotly to his cheek as he recalled the kiss his eager lips had stolen. Marry that old scoundrel's daughter? No, he could not; and yet how his pulses bounded at the thought of her—the sweet, shy gladness in her eyes, the soft, thrilling tones in her voice when she spoke his name, the heroism of her conduct in daring to seek his camp in the darkness of night and bring him warning of that diabolical scheme of robbery and murder; the refinement of her manner, and then, too, her knowledge of the English tongue. Where had she acquired these? What would she not be justified in thinking of him if he never came to seek and thank her?

“Hello! what's that?” was the sudden cry among the men. Two or three soldiers sat up in the shade and curiously inspected the coming object; others shouted laughing challenge. Riding solemnly forward, a little Mexican boy came straight to where Adriance was lying and handed him a note which he eagerly opened and read:

They suspect me, and they send me away tomorrow. To-night I go for the last time to the summer house alone. Isabel.

Gone was every resolution at the instant; gone all hesitancy. Adriance had not even time to wonder at the fact that she had written to him in English. Leaving the note for Rawlins to read when he returned, in one hour Phil was rolling from the camp in the ambulance. Soon after dark, leaving Private Regan and another man half a mile back from the walls of the corral, Mr. Adriance, all alone, slowly made his way afoot toward the dim lights at the rancho. Making wide circuit so as not to alarm the dogs, he never sought to draw near the little summer house until, from the east, he could see the brighter lights that gleamed in the bar and card room. Then he cautiously approached, his heart beating quickly and his knees trembling a little, perhaps from weakness. Hark! Faint, soft and clear, there rose upon the evening air the liquid notes of a guitar. It was she then—it was Isabel awaiting his coming, aye, signaling softly to call him to her. What could it mean but that

she loved and longed to see him? A moment more and he was at the doorway, the very spot where he had surprised her that well-remembered night. The plaintive tinkle of the guitar continued, and there in the dark corner was the dim, white-robed form. He could almost distinguish the folds of the graceful *rebosa*.

“Isabel!” he whispered. Three more steps and he would be at her side. Suddenly two stalwart arms were thrown about him, a broad hand was on his mouth, stifling the utterance of a sound; the white-robed form in front leaped toward him, the *rebosa* falling to the ground. It was a man's voice—a Mexican's—that hissed the word's: “Quick! the pistol.” Another hand was at his holster. He realized instantly that he was lured, trapped; that his life was threatened. He was struggling violently, but, weakened by his wound, even his superb physique was well nigh powerless in the grasp of two or three men. Suddenly there came a whisper: “The sponge, the sponge!” and then the subtle odor of chloroform on the night air. And now he nerved himself for one supreme effort. A quick twist of his head and the hand was dislodged, a finger slipping between his teeth. With all his strength he crushed it to the very bone, and there was a yell of pain and terror. Then his own brave young voice rang out in one startling, rallying cry.

“Help! Regan, help!” Then crash and blows, the gleam of a knife, a rolling, rough-and-tumble struggle on the ground; then a woman's scream, a light, and Isabel had bounded into their midst, her mother at her back.

“Leon, my brother! In God's name, what do you mean?”

Even as she spoke her startled eyes fell on Adriance, staggering to his feet, pale, bleeding, faint. Another instant and he went crashing back against the guitar that, like siren's song, had lured him. One brave leap and she was at his side, her arms about his neck, his pallid face pillowed on her bosom.

Senora Dolores flew to her aid; then turning, holding her lantern on high, her shrill voice rang out in fury:

“Look at the monstrous work your son has wrought, Pedro Ruiz! Look! Tear off that mantle, senor!” she said, whirling upon another form now slowly rising from the earth. “Coward! murderer that you are! It is you who have ruined this boy and made him what he is!”

“Hush! You fool! there lies your daughter's betrayer. Leon would have been coward indeed if he had not punished him.”

“Oh, you lie! She never saw him alone in her life!”

“Ask your son,” was the sneering answer. “Ask José, too.”

“She was with him—in his tent—the last night he was here; I swear it!” cried José.

“Mother,” cried the girl, “listen, it was but to warn him—I heard the plot—I heard all. I rushed to him only to tell him of the danger. Mother, believe me. And I dare not tell it even to you, for fear—for fear of him.” And she pointed to the fierce, scowling face of the old Mexican, now striding forward, knife in hand.

“No, Pedro—back! You shall not harm her! No!” and the mother hurled herself before her husband.

“Out of the way!” was the hissing answer, “or you, too, feel my knife. Ah, traitress!”

“O my God! help! There will be murder here! Pedro, husband! O, villain, she is not your child! You shall not kill!” And then a piercing shriek rang out upon the night. But at the same instant there came the rush of hoofs without—a rush of panting men; a brawny trooper sprang into the summer house and with one blow of his revolver butt sent Pedro staggering into a corner, his knife falling from his nerveless hand. A dark, agile figure leaped for the doorway, with muttered curse. And then in came old Rawlins, somewhat “blown,” but preternaturally cool, and the doctor close behind.

“Bring another light here, one of you men!” And a trooper ran to the card room. “Lie still there, Pedro! Blow his brains out if he moves! Doctor, you look to the women and Adriance. Now, where's that man Staines?”

“Some fellow ran in through here, captain,” said a trooper. “Corporal Watts is after him with Royce.”

“Who was it, you greaser? Speak, damn you! You were here with him!”

“Sonora Bill,” said José, shaking from head to foot.

Then there came the sound of pistol shots out toward the corral, and then the louder bang of a cavalry carbine.

“What is it?” asked Rawlins of a soldier who came running back.

A LITTLE MEXICAN BOY CAME STRAIGHT TO WHERE ADRIANCE WAS LYING.

“Can we have the doctor, sir? It was Mr. Staines. He shot the corporal, who was chasing him, but he got a carbine bullet through the heart.”

Four days afterward, lying in a little white room, Mr. Adriance listened to the story of Leon's confession. It was brief enough. Staines had acquired an ascendency over him in Tucson, and it was not difficult to induce him to become a confederate in every plot. It was Staines who sent him to Manuel and Garcia to warn them that the paymaster's ambulance would not reach Canyon del Muerto until morning. It was Staines who murdered Sergeant Dinsmore after a quarrel and then had had his throat cut and the body thrown into the Gila near the ranch. Staines had fallen in love with Isabel when she first came from Sonora, but the girl shrank from him; neither would she listen to Sergeant Dinsmore.

After it was safe for Leon to return to the ranch, he found that his mother and Isabel were practically prisoners. His father was furious at the failure of the plan, and daily accused his wife of having, in some way, given warning to Adriance, and swore that he would have the blood of the man or woman who had betrayed the scheme; and then Staines himself came back and wrung from José that he had seen Isabel scurrying from Adri-ance's tent at daybreak, and so denounced her to Leon as the mistress of an accursed Gringo. Staines wrote the note that was to lure Adriance to the bower, where Leon was to take the guitar and *rebosa* and the two, with José's help, were to overpower him. It was his life or theirs said Staines. Pedro was not in the project, for he had prohibited bloodshed about the place—"It would ruin his business" he said. But both Pedro and Leon were now in irons, and Rawlins' troop was in camp around gloomy old Rancho Ruiz.

"ONE OF THE TROOPERS REELED IN THE SADDLE AS HIS CHARGER WH IT."

A day or two later he heard another story, this time from the lips of Senora Dolores herself: Isabel was not the daughter of Pedro Ruiz.

With sobs and tears the poor, broken woman told her tale. She had been married when quite a young girl to Senor Moreno, an officer of distinction in the Mexican army. Her brave husband made her life a happy one, and the birth of the little daughter strengthened the ties that bound them. Alas! Moreno, colonel of lancers, was killed before Queretaro; and in two years more the widow, with her winsome little girl, had not where to lay her head. It was in the city of Mexico that Senora Dolores then met Ruiz, a widower with an only son, prosperous and apparently respected. He promised to educate Isabel and provide for her as his own, and sought the widow as his wife. For a time all went well; then she learned his true character. He was compelled to leave the city and flee up the coast to Mazatlan, while she remained with little Isabel, who was being educated at the convent. At last they had to join him at Hermosillo, whence he was soon after driven to Tucson. Their lives were wrecked by his scoundrelism. Her papers clearly established the truth of her story.

One soft, still evening, not a week after the tragic events of that rueful night, Captain Rawlins sat by the lieutenant's side, reading aloud some letters just received from department headquarters. Major Sherrick had been in a state of dismay ever since the news of the death of Staines had reached him, but his dismay changed to wonderment, even gratitude, as he learned the true character of the man. It was Sonora Bill himself, beyond doubt.

"What a blessing you left that note for me to see!" said Rawlins. "How came it you never saw it was a forgery, Phil? Had she never written to you before?"

"Never a line, nor have I seen her to thank her. By Heaven, Rawlins! why am I forbidden?"

"You are not—now, Phil," was the smiling answer.

Perhaps an hour later, Adriance limped slowly out of the room and down the narrow passageway to the side door. Yonder stood the little summer house "in the gloaming," and he was right—he had heard women's voices there—Dolores and her daughter. There were tears in the maiden's words, and he could not withstand the longing of his heart. He would have hobbled thither, but suddenly there came the sound of rustling skirt and a tiny footfall. It was she—his dark-eyed, dark-haired sweetheart, hastening toward him, her face hidden in her hands. One instant more and he had torn the hands away and had clasped her to his breast.

"Isabel! darling! I have found you at last! No, you shall not go—you shall not until you promise—promise to be my wife!

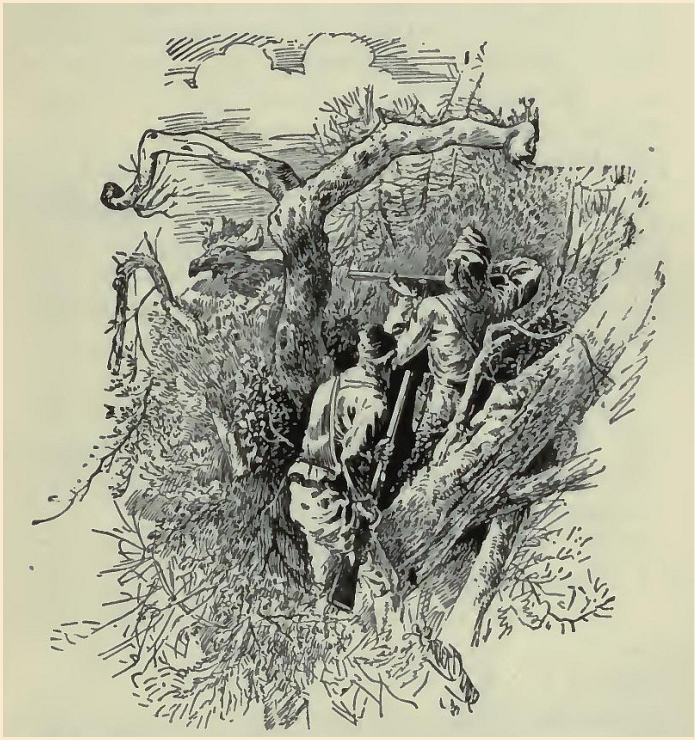
"O, senor, you cannot—you do not mean it," she sobbed, Struggling to be free.

"Do not mean it! Why, sweet one, you do not dream how I love you—how I long for you! Not mean it? Isabel, look in my eyes. Look for yourself." He laughed low and happily. He was brimming over with hope and gladness, for now at last without a struggle she nestled on his heart.

Despite his grizzled beard old Rawlins was best man when that strange, very quiet, yet very happy wedding came off in the Old Mission Church at Tucson early in the spring. Pedro was not there to give the bride away.

With considerable escort and much reluctance he had traversed “Cutthroat Crossing” some months before. He went to Yavapai, and Yavapai—we have his own words for it—was “too damn close to 'ell.” The rancho passed within the year to other hands. It, too, had taken on another name—a grewsome one—*Rancho del Muerto*.

A MIGHTY HUNTER BEFORE THE LORD, By Virginius Dabney.



FIRST PART

THE man unacquainted with the joys of the chase would be surprised if told, as he sauntered through some city market, that there was far more pleasure in hunting those plump little brown birds hanging in bunches around the stalls than in pursuing that imposing beast whose antlers reach the pavement. Yet it would be true.

Deer hunting under its usual conditions leaves something, often much, to be desired. If a dozen men are placed on isolated “stands” the solitary hours of waiting are long and weary. And should you happen to be a tyro the knowing ones hide you away in some unlikely spot, where hardly by any possibility will the chance come to you of seeing and, in the shivers of “buck ague,” missing the game. “Still hunting,” another mode, is well named. As a rule it may be depended upon to afford no end of stillness, and little else. And to be rowed up by a hired guide on a lake to within a few feet of a poor, helpless buck, swimming for dear life, and blow out his brains is almost as bad as shooting pheasants in an English preserve or poultry in a barnyard. Under all these methods deer hunting lacks what is the conspicuous charm of partridge (quail) shooting—vivid and continuous excitement.

For, from the moment when you enter, on a sparkling autumn morning, a brown stubble field, fresh of limb and eager for the fray, till you limp back at sunset, wolfish for dinner, and broken with a delicious fatigue, you have not had one dull moment. You may not have been firing steadily; the birds may even have been a little scarce; but every instant of the day, as you have watched your dogs sweeping to and fro, you have been buoyed up by an ever lively hope that the next moment your heart will be gladdened by seeing them halt—frozen as it were—in their tracks. Ah, there they are! You hurry up, you and your friend, breathing short. Up bursts the brown covey, with startling buzz! You bang away—innocuously it may be, but no matter, you have made a prodigious noise, at any rate—that's some comfort. And see now! The little brown balls have dropped into the weeds, one here, one there, along the ditch, and a little bunch, all together, in that clump of briars on the hillside. Better luck next time!

Still, after all, “Bob White,” for all his bustle, is but a small chap. It would take hundreds, nay, bushels of him, to outweigh one “antlered monarch.” Toothsome though he be (on toast) he tips the scales at a beggarly

half pound. On the other hand, it often takes you a week or so to get one chance at a deer.

Now, it so happens that it was once my fortune to take part in a deer hunt, where the excitement was as continuous as that in a stubble field, and, naturally, far more intense. This was years ago, and in Scott County, Mississippi, two days' journey on horseback from our plantation.

Every November, as a child, I had eagerly hailed the return from the camp hunt of the big four-mule wagon, laden with tents, cooking utensils and provisions, and upon which were piled high the noble bucks and sleek does. At last, when I had reached the age of sixteen, the longed-for permission was granted me, and one crisp, frosty morning my father and I mounted our horses and set out for Scott County, followed by Beverly and the great covered wagon. Both Beverly and Ned, his whitish-gray saddle mule, had their peculiarities, as will appear later.

As we journeyed on we were joined at successive cross roads by others of our hunting party, and when we reached the ground we numbered, with those already arrived by other routes, about fifteen. The tents were soon pitched and a roaring fire of logs six feet long was sending up its merry sparks into the starry vault above us. Would supper never be ready?

Meanwhile the tents flashed in the fire light, the ruddy glow of which battled with the hosts of darkness that advanced upon us under cover of the primeval, mysterious forest that surrounded us far and wide. And that forest teeming with deer and wolves. Oh, how delightful! And my Latin grammar miles and miles away! And dust accumulating on my arithmetic!

“Why, where is Billy?”

“Detained by business; he will join us in a day or two.”

“Good! A hunt without Billy Blount is no hunt at all.”

At the mere mention of his name every eye brightened. Mr. Blount had more than one peculiarity, all of them pleasant. He was just one of those mortals whom mothers in their fatuity christen William. If ever there was a man born with an inalienable right to be called Billy it was he. A stranger meeting him in the road would know by intuition that that was his name. His twinkling eye suggested it. His ruddy brown dimpled cheek, his breadth of smile proclaimed it, and when he laughed every well-lined rib shouted aloud, “Our name is Billy!”

But he was not with us; so the next best thing was to tell stories of his exploits. To these I listened with wide-eyed delight. I will give one as a sample. But that it may be understood, it will be necessary to show beforehand the very unusual method of hunting that obtained in Scott County.

That portion of Mississippi was in those days almost uninhabited and was covered by a forest—it would be almost correct to call it a grove—of post oaks, beneath which grew waist high underbrush. The oaks which covered the ground almost to the exclusion of other trees stood so far apart that one had an outlook of perhaps a couple of hundred yards in every direction, so that a good rider could gallop in comfort along the open spaces. This tree bears a small but sweet nutritious acorn; hence the great store of deer that frequented these forests.

Such being the nature of the ground the chase is conducted as follows: The hunters throw themselves into a skirmish line at intervals of sixty or eighty yards. In the centre rides the leader of the hunt with a compass fixed upon the pommel of his saddle. The line advances through the woods due north, let us say, for a few hours; then wheels at right angle and moves east; then south, then west—back to camp, venison steaks and wild turkey; for, in the interests of better fare, it was permitted to knock over a gobbler if he were too hospitably saucy to get out of the way. The deer were not equally abundant year after year. Occasionally it was found that “black tongue” had worked havoc among them since the preceding hunt. But they were always numerous enough to maintain a continuous and intense glow of expectation in the breast of every hunter. As a rule you rode straight ahead, swerving neither to the right nor the left, every nerve on the alert, from sunrise till' sunset. But if you saw a little out of your path an upturned tree you bent your course toward it, your heart in your mouth. I have known as many as seven deer to bound forth from the brown-leaved “lap” of one fallen oak. But at any moment during the day you were liable to be startled by a buck springing up out of the undergrowth, often from beneath the very feet of your horse.

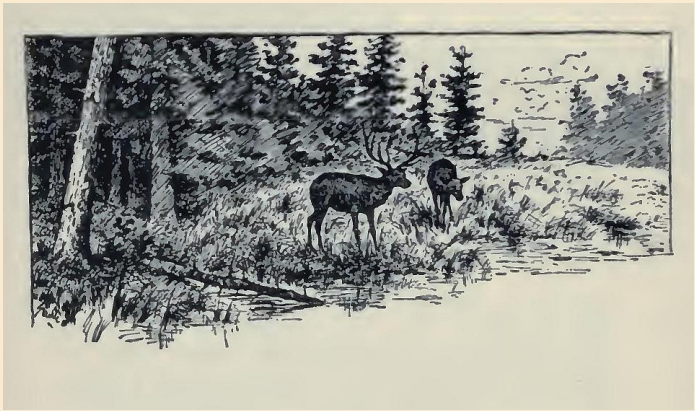
Only an inexperienced hunter would ask: “Why not shoot them where they lie?” You do not know they are there. The detective eye that can make out the form of a deer crouched down on a bed of brown leaves and veiled with a fringe of underbrush is given to few. Among these favored ones was our friend Billy. It was generally believed in camp that he shot most of his game in their beds. Billy himself was at no pains, of course, to spread this view. In his highly-illustrated accounts of his achievements the quarry was always going like the wind; he had not been sure, in fact, what he fired at; he saw a brown flash, that was all; banged away, and down came that thumping buck. Never was so surprised in his life; thought it was a hawk or something. But this is the story of Mr. Jennings, brother of the leader of the hunt: “Blount rides on my right, and I don't know how I shall get on without him, even for a day or two. However, I may live longer if he is not there, for he sows his buckshot broadcast. Three years ago—I never knew the deer so thick as they were that season—happening to look in his direction, I saw him dismounting with an agility that was surprising considering his 225 pounds. He halted me with an eager wave of his hand and began advancing on tiptoe; every fibre of his vast form tense, his eyes riveted upon some object in front, finger on trigger. Barely had he crept forward ten yards when up sprang a buck hardly twenty feet in front of him and darted to the rear, between Blount and me. Instantly, without once removing his eyes from the game upon which he was stealing, he whirled his gun to the right and pulled the trigger. The buck passed on, while twigs and bark rained on me from the whizzing buckshot. Would you believe it?—but you all know him—not a moment did he halt or once remove his eyes from whatever it was that had fascinated his gaze in front. He still danced forward, light as an Indian, with eyes starting from their sockets. Presently up jumps a doe. She, too, bounded to the rear, but on Blount's left this time. Again, with his staring eyes still glued to the something in front—bang! 'What in the ——— are you about?' roared Parrish from Blount's left; 'you will be shooting somebody the first thing you know. Here is one of your crazy shot through my hat.' To all which our wild man paid not the least attention. 'Jennings! Jennings! come here! come here! come here! quick! quick! quick! For

God's sake, man, hurry!'

“I dismounted and ran up to him. 'There! there! give it to him! Good Lord, man, can't you see him? There, in that lap!' I strained my eyes in vain. I could see nothing. 'Why, don't you see him turning his head? He is looking at us! My Lord, Jennings, gimme the gun! gimme the gun! gimme the gun!' Just as I did so a noble buck sprang from the lap and bounded off. Blount drew down upon him. Bound after bound, and still Blount did not fire, though he seemed to be pulling away for dear life at the triggers. Presently the deer, passing behind a clump of trees, disappeared. I carried my gun at half cock. This Blount did not know or remember. He bent both my triggers. Any other man might very well have bagged all three deer with such a chance. And what do you suppose he then said? 'At any rate, I laid out two of the rascals. Come, Jennings, help me find 'em.'”

Dogs were not used on these hunts. Two or three trusty old hounds, it is true, hung about the heels of our leader's horse, but they were employed only in running down badly-wounded animals. For the first day or so these dogs were hard to control, so rich was the scent that met their nostrils at every turn; but after the third day they grew too *blasé* to take any interest in any trail not sprinkled with blood. We had a number of horn signals. If a gun was heard, followed by a long blast (every man wore a horn), the line halted. A deer had been killed in its tracks. A second blast indicated that the quarry had been strapped behind the saddle of the lucky man; and once more the line moved forward. But if three or four short, excited toots, mingled with shouts, rang out upon the frosty air, a wounded deer was being pursued, and the leader of the hunt galloped up, followed by his little pack, who soon pulled down the game.

After all my boasting about the abundance of deer in these post-oak forests the reader is, I dare say, prepared to learn that with a party of fifteen the spoil of a ten-days hunt would be one thousand head at the very least. Great will be his surprise therefore to learn that at the close of our first day's hunt we returned to camp without one solitary buck or doe to show to our disgusted cooks. Never had the game been so scarce, and yet not a man of us all had the same loads in his gun with which he had sallied gaily forth full of hope in the morning. One fine buck alone had emptied just thirty barrels for us. Flushed on the extreme right, he had bounded along in front of the whole line, a trifle out of range, perhaps, and each one of us had given him a roaring double salute. As the rolling thunder approached me I almost ceased to breathe. What were conjugations and declensions and rules of three compared with this! It was like a battle, as I have since discovered, with the notable difference that our side made all the noise, and the deer did not shoot back. But none of us had been able, in the language of Mr. Sam Weller's Dick Turpin ditty, to “prewail upon him for to stop.” Other shots at other deer all of us had, but we supped on bacon that evening.



SECOND PART

ONE who has never tried the experiment can have no idea how easy it is to miss when firing from horseback at a buck who sends your heart up into your mouth by springing up from beneath your horse's heels, and then speeds away, twisting and turning among the boles of the trees. Men who could bring down a partridge with each barrel have been known to shoot away half a bag of shot before they began to get the hang of the thing.

The shades of evening were falling. Humiliating though it was, we had fallen, too, with a will on our gameless supper.

“S-t! Listen! What's that?”

We pricked up our ears. Presently there came softly echoing from far away in the forest a long-drawn cry, ringing, melodious, clear as a bugle call.

“Billy!”

The welkin rang with our joyous shouts. Half our party sprang to their feet and red-hot coffee splashed from tin cups. “Hurrah!”

“Marse Billy got the keenest holler I ever hear!” chuckled Beverly. “Bound he fetch luck 'long wid him! No mo' bacon for supper arter dis.”

We craned our necks to catch the first glimpse of our mascot. Obviously, from the direction of the joyous yells with which he answered our welcoming shouts, he had abandoned the road and was riding straight through the open woods. Presently we descried through the deepening twilight his portly form looming up atop a tall gray. Then two vivid flashes and two loud reports, followed by a mad rush of the gray, which came

tearing down on us in wild terror, and for a minute we were treated to something like an amateur episode from one of Mr. Buffalo Bill's entertainments. Amid roars of laughing welcome the ponderous knight was at last helped down from his trembling steed, whose bridle Beverly had been able luckily to snatch as he floundered among the tent ropes.

“And where the deuce did you pick up that wild beast? Surely you can't expect to shoot from him!”

“Oh, I'll cool him down in a day or two; he'll soon get used to it.”

In point of fact a horse who dreads a gun gets more and more terror stricken as the hunt goes on, the mere sight of a deer, the cocking of a gun even, sufficing to set him off into plungings that grow day by day more violent. This none should have known better than Blount; for never, by any chance, did he ride to the hunt with an animal that would “stand fire.” The discharge of his gun, the rise of a buck even, was always the opening of a circus with him. But he managed invariably to let off both barrels—one perhaps through the tree tops, the other into the ground. In one particular alone was he provident. He brought always so immense a supply of ammunition that toward the close of the hunt his tent was a supply magazine to the less thoughtful.

“What!” exclaimed Blount, “not a single one! Ah! boys, that was because I was not with you.” The jovial soul had not a trace of conceit; he was merely sanguine—contagiously, gloriously, magnificently sanguine.

“Ah, but won't we knock 'em over tomorrow!” And straightway we lifted up our hearts and had faith in this prophet of pleasant things.

“Beverly, will that mule Ned stand fire?”

“I dunno, Marse Billy; nobody ain't nebber tried him. But I 'spec' you wouldn't ax him no odds.”

“I'll go and have a look at him.”

Shortly afterward we heard two tremendous explosions, followed by a frenzied clatter of hoofs and the sound of breaking branches, and up there came, running and laughing, a Monsieur Wynen, a Belgian violinist, a real artist, who was one of our party (though never a trigger did he pull during the entire hunt).

“What's the matter?”

Wynen was first violin in an opera troupe.

“It is only Blount rehearsing Ned.”

Any man in the world except Blount would have tested that demure wheel mule's views as to firearms by firing off his gun in his neighborhood as he stood tethered. Not so Billy. Mounting the guileless and unsuspecting Ned, and casting the reins upon his bristly neck, he had let drive.

Shocked beyond expression by the dreadful roar and flash (it was now night) Ned had made a mad rush through the woods. In vain; for Blount had a good seat. Then had there come into Ned's wily brain the reminiscence of a trick that he had never known to fail in thirty years. He stopped suddenly, still as a gate post, at the same time bracing his vertebrae into the similitude of a barrel hoop, and instantly Blount lay sprawling upon his jolly back; and there was a second roar, followed by a rush of buckshot among the leaves and around the legs of the audience that was watching the rehearsal. “Never mind, Jack,” said he to me, shortly afterward, “I'll find something that will stand fire” and throwing his arm around my shoulder for a confidential talk of the slaughter he was to do on the morrow, his sanguine soul bubbled into my sympathetic ear:

“I say, Jack, don't tell the boys; but I have got two bags of shot. They would laugh, of course. Now, how many ought a fellow to bring down with two bags? I mean a cool-headed chap who does not lose his head. How does one dozen to the bag strike you? Reasonable? H'm? Of course. Twenty-four, then. Well, let us say twenty-five, just to round off things. Golly! Why, nine is the highest score I ever made. Twenty-five! Why, that is a quarter of a hundred. Did you notice that? Whee-ew! The boys will stop bedeviling me after that, h'm? I should say so. Not a rascal of them all ever killed so many. Cool and steady, that's the thing, my boy. Up he jumps! What of that? Don't be flustered, I tell you. Count ten. Then lower your gun. There is not the least hurry in the world. Drop the muzzle on his side, just behind his shoulder. Steady! Let him think you are not after deer this morning. If it is a doe let it appear that you are loaded for buck. Bang! Over he tumbles in his tracks. You load up and are off again. Up hops another—a beauty. Same tactics—boo-doo-ee! Got him! What's the sense of throwing away your shot? Costs money—delays the line. Cool—cool and steady—that's the word, my boy. Get any shots to-day? Three? Hit anything?”

It was too dark for him to see how pale I went at this question. “Mr. Blount,” said I, with a choking in my throat (nobody could help telling the big-hearted fellow everything), “you won't tell my father, will you?”

“Tell him what?”

“Well, you see, he cautioned me over and over again never, under any circumstances, to fire at a deer that ran toward a neighboring huntsman.”

“Of course not—never!” echoed Blount with conviction.

“And to-day—and to-day, when I was not thinking of such a thing, a big buck jumped up from right under my horse's belly, and did you notice that gray-headed old gentleman by the fire? Well, the buck rushed straight toward him—and I forgot all about what my father had said and banged away.”

“Did you pepper him?” put in Billy eagerly.

“Pepper him!”

“I mean the buck.”

“I don't know, he went on.”

“They will do it, occasionally, somehow.”

“When I saw the leaves raining down on the old gentleman, my heart stopped beating. You will not tell my father?”

“Pshaw! There was no harm done. We must trust to Providence in these matters. What did the old gentleman say?”

“Not a word; it was his first campaign, too. His eyes were nearly popping out of his head. He let off both

barrels. The shot whistled around me!”

“The old fool! He ought to know better. To-morrow your father must put you next to me.”

Blount brought us hilarity and hope, but no luck, at any rate at first. When we rode slowly into camp on the following day, just as the sun went down, we had one solitary doe to show. Blount—Blount of all men—had killed it. The servants hung it up on one of the poles that remained from year to year stretched against the neighboring trees.

Owing to Blount's weight his game was always strapped behind some less lucky huntsman; so we had had no opportunity of examining his riddled quarry.

“Why, how is this?” exclaimed he. “Oh, I remember; the other side was toward me.”

We went around to the other side. Had the doe died of fright? After much searching we found one bullet hole just behind the shoulder. Blount always put four extra bullets into his load. So he had showered down forty buckshot upon a doe lying in her bed at a distance of twenty feet and struck her with one.

“I say, Jack, for the Lord's sake don't tell the boys!”

After these two days our luck improved, and at the end of the hunt our score reached seventy-eight; the smallest number, by the way, that the club had ever killed. It would hardly be interesting to go into the details of each day's sport, but our hero's adventures one night seem worth recording. To this joyous and indefatigable spirit the day was all too short. No sooner had he eaten his supper each day than he began to importune the younger men of the party to join him in a “fire hunt;” but, as they were not Blounts, they felt that a long day in the saddle was enough. In his despair Blount turned to Beverly. That amiable creature, not knowing how to refuse the request of a white gentmun, assented, but with a quaking heart, for were not the surrounding forests swarming with ravenous wolves? He had often lain awake and listened complacently enough to their howling, but to trust, to thrust, himself wantonly among them at dead of night!

“Wid nobody along but Marse Billy Blount, an' he couldn't hit nothin', even by daylight, onless dey asleep. He hear 'em say wolf 'fraid o' fire. Maybe he is. But lights draws dem wild varmints, an' 'sposin' arter a whole congregation un 'em done come up starin' at de light; 'sposin' somehow or nuther de torch got out—whar Beverly den? Marse Billy got de gun; but whar Beverly? Ain't I hear people say wolf more ambitiouser for niggar dan for sheep meat? Howsomever, ef my own mahster willin' to resk losin' of me, I can stand it, I reckon. But Tom, ef you should wake up, and hear something coming through de bresh like a drove o' steers, you needn't ax what dat; it's me and de wolves a-makin' for camp; an' me in the lead, wid de help o' de Laud.” Sitting in front of the blazing logs and chatting with his fellow cooks, Beverly could see the humor of his quite real fears.

Behold, then, the burly knight and his dusky and not over-valiant squire setting forth in quest of adventure—the one mounted on his tall gray, the other astraddle of Ned. It appears incredible that any man in his senses would take two such ani-malson such an expedition, but there never was but one Blount. Beverly carried the gun, his chief the torch, consisting of “lightwood” knots blazing in the bowl of a long-handled frying pan. The handle, resting on the right shoulder, was held somewhat depressed, so that the light should shine above the head of the huntsman, illumining the woods in his front. The sportsman, slowly waving the handle to and fro, peers intently into the darkness in quest of the gleaming eyes of some staring buck.

Presently a dismal howl from far away to the right came stealing through the silence. And presently an answering cry from the left, and much nearer. And another, and another! *Ugh! what was that?* A rabbit had darted under Ned, across the rattling leaves. Beverly, shivering, dug his heels into Ned's ribs. Ned pressed forward till his nose touched the ticklish flank of the gray. The gray let fly with whizzing hoof. Ned shut his eyes, unwilling to witness the enormity of an aged mule being kicked at by torchlight.

“Beverly! Beverly!” breathed the knight eagerly, “gimme the gun! gimme the gun! I see a pair of eyes as big as saucers!”

“M—M—Marse B—B—Billy————————”

“Quick! gimme the gun! What the devil is the matter with you?”

“De wolves, Marse Billy! 'Sposin' arter de gun done empty dey splunge in upon us? I bound a whole nation un 'em watchin' us dis minute!”

Blount wrested the gun from the reluctant Beverly, whose knee now trembled against his. Pressing down the pan handle so as to throw the light well in front, he cocked the gun, adjusted it to his shoulder, took aim, and pulled the trigger.

Blount, in reply to the warning of his friends, had urged that it might very well be that a horse that shied by day at a gun would act differently at night. And he was right. By daylight the gray was in the habit of making one or two violent plunges when his rider fired. But tonight, when that terrible roar broke the stillness and that fierce blaze flashed into his eyes——

Immediately after the sound of the gun reached us we heard the anxious, jolting bray of a trotting mule. The disjointed, semi-asinine song came nearer, and presently Ned hurried past the fire to his place by his tethered mate, with a low equine chuckle of satisfaction. In his wake rushed Beverly, panting, wide eyed. It was a full minute before he could speak.

“Lord, mahsters, don't ax me nothin'; I don't know nothin' 'bout it. I 'most don't know whether I here or no arter de way dem revengious varmints whoop me through dem woods, a-yelpin' an' a-gnash-in' o' deir teeth. B'fo' Gaud, I thought every minute was gwine to be my next! When Marse Billy shoot, though I beg him not to, seein' dat de whole woods was a-bilin' wid wolves, dat fool of a horse o' hisn jess riz on his hind legs an' splunge right over me an' Ned, jess like we warn't nothin't all. Dem lightwood knots flew right up, same as one o' dem blaze o' glories I see when I got religion. I lit on my head. Ned he went oneway; Marse Billy horse anudder. But seein' as I done knowed Ned de longest, I followed him—an' he fotch me home. Run? No, twarnt runnin', twas flyin'; an' every jump de varmints was a-reachin' for me. I hear deir teeth, jess as plain, clashin' like sheep shears. Umgh-umgh! Beverly hump heself he did. Jess look at my clothes! I left de rest of 'em on de bushes. Whar Marse Billy? Lord a-mussy, I dunno! I mighty 'fraid de wolves done got him, leastwise ef he didn't set hard on dat dere fool gray.

“Mahster, couldn't you gimme jess a leetle tetch o' dat whiskey? I'se powerful downhearted. Thank you, mahster. But mahster, don't lemme go no mo' a spotin' along o' Marse Billy; seem like I ain't dat kind. Lemme drive my mules, lemme cook, don't lemme go projickin' about wid Marse Billy Blount no mo'. You laughin', is you, Tom? Nemmind—you go next time!”

Presently there came to us from far away a doleful yell, with nothing of the bugle blast in it. “There he is!” and we made response with laughter-choked shouts.

About fifteen minutes afterward the sound of hoofs was heard, and presently our mighty hunter appeared, but *quantum mutatus ab illo!* No hat, no gun, one skirt of his coat and half of the buttons gone; shirt bosom torn out, trousers hanging in ribbons! But though his face was scratched beyond recognition he remained the one, only true Blount in the world; though his eyes were bloodshot they beamed with conscious victory.

“Boys,” said he, “which of you will go and help me bring him in?”

“Bring what in?”

“Why, the buck—I blew his infernal head off, sure!”

Next morning Blount and Beverly rode to the scene of their exploit, and Blount secured his gun and Beverly his frying pan. 'The buck had either walked off without his head or been swallowed by one of the varmints.

A CAHUTTA VALLEY SHOOTING MATCH, By Will N. Harben

HERE was a sound of merriment on Farmer Bagley's place. It was “corn shucking” night, and the young people from all sides had met to partake of mirth and hospitality. After all had taken seats in the large sitting room and parlor, the men were invited with a mysterious wink and grin from the countenance of jovial Bagley to taste the contents of a large brown jug which smiled on a shelf beside the water bucket out in the entry. Its saturated corn-cob stopper, lying whiskey colored in the moonlight by the side of the jug, gave a most tempting aroma to the crisp, invigorating November air and rendered Bagley's signs and hints all the more comprehensible.

They were mostly young men who, with clattering boots, filed out to the shelf and turned, with smacking lips wiped on their hands, back to the clusters of shy, tittering maidens round the blazing log fires. They wore new jean trousers neatly folded round muscular calves and stowed away, without a visible wrinkle, into high, colored-topped boots with sharp, brightly-polished heels, upon which were strapped clanking spurs. Their sack coats, worn without vests over low-necked woolen shirts, fitted their strong bodies admirably.

Dick Martin, a tall, well-built young man with marked timidity in his voice, considerably augmented by the brightness of Melissa Bagley's eyes, drew near that young lady and said:

“Yore pap has certainly got some o' the best corn licker in this county, Melissa; it liter'ly sets a feller on fire.”

“Be ashamed, Dick Martin!” she answered, with a cautious glance around her as if she feared that someone would observe the flush that had risen into her pretty face as he approached. “Be ashamed o' yorese'f fur techin' licker; last log-rollin' you 'lowed you'd tuk yore last dram. Paw ort to be churched fur settin' temptation 'fore so many young men. Ef I had my way the' wouldn't be a still, wild cat nur licensed, in the Cohutta Mountains nowhar.”

“Shucks, Melissa!” exclaimed Dick. “Don't git yore dander up 'bout nothin'. I'm that anxious to git yore pap on my side I'd drink slop, mighty high, ef he 'uz to ax me. He don't like me, an' blame me ef I know why, nuther. I ain't been here in the last three Sunday nights 'thout him a-callin' you to bed most 'fore dark. He didn't raise no objections to Bill Miller a-stayin' tell 'leven o'clock last Tuesday night. Oh, I ain't blind to hurt! Bill owns his own land and I havn't a shovelful; thar's the difference. He's a-comin' now, but mind you I'm agwine to set by you at shuckin'.”

The bright flush which had added such beauty to the girl's face vanished as Bill Miller swaggered up and said with a loud voice, as he roughly shook her hand:

“Meliss', kin I wait on you at shuckin'?”

“Dick's jest this minute axed me,” she stammered, beginning to blush anew.

“Well, he ain't axed to set on both sides uv you, I reckon. You'd be a uncommon quar pusson ef the' wuz jest one side to you. What's to keep me frum settin' on tother side frum Dick?”

To this the farmer's daughter made no reply, and as the guests were now starting to the barnyard she was escorted between the two rivals to the great coneshaped heap of unhusked corn gleaming in the pale moonlight.

“All keep yore feet an' form a ring round the pile!” called out Bagley, so as to be overheard above the sound of their voices. “The' ain't no r'al fun 'thout everything is conducted fa'r and squar'. Now” (as all the merrymakers stood hand in hand round the corn heap, Dick with one of Melissa's hands in his tight clasp and his rival with the other)—“now, all march round an' somebody start 'King William Wuz King James' Son,' an'

when I tell you to halt set down right whar' you are. I'm a-doin' this 'kase at Wade's last week some fellers hid red yeers o' corn nigh the'r places an' wuz etarnally a-kissin' o' the gals, which ain't fa'r nur decent. The rule on this occasion shall be as common, in regard to the fust feller that finds a red yeer o'corn bein' 'lowed to kiss any gal he likes, but atter that one time—understand everybody—atter that no bussin' kin take place, red yeer ur no red yeer. I advocate moderation in all things, especially whar' a man an' woman's mouth is consarned."

While the musical tones of the familiar song were rising, and the straw beneath the feet of the human chain was rustling, Bagley called aloud the word: "Halt!" and all sat down immediately and went to work with a will. Song after song was sung. The hard, pearly silk-tipped ears of corn flew through the air and rained into the crib near at hand, and billows of husks rolled up behind the eager workers and were raked away by negroes who were not permitted to take part in the sport.

"Here's a red un, by hunky!" yelled out a sunburnt, downy-faced youth, standing up and holding aloft a small ear of blood-red corn.

"Hold on thar!" shouted Bagley in commanding tones. "The rules must be enforced to the letter. Jim Lash, ef yore yeer measures full six inches ye're the lucky man, but ef it falls short o' that size its a nubbin an' don't count."

An eager group encircled the young man, but soon a loud laugh rose and they all fell back into their places, for the ear had proved to be only five inches in length.

"Not yit, Jimmy Lash; not yit," grunted Dick Martin, as he raked an armful of unhusked corn into his and Melissa's laps. Then to Melissa in an undertone: "Ef wishin' 'u'd do any good, I'd be the fust to run acrost one, fur, by jingo! the' ain't a livin' man, Melissa, that could want it as bad as I do with you a-settin' so handy. By glory! [aloud] here she is, as red as sumac an' as long as a rollin' pin. The Lord be praised!" He had risen to his feet and stood holding up the trophy for Bagley's inspection, fairly aglow with triumph and exercise.

The rustling in the corn husks ceased. All eyes were directed upon the erect forms of Dick Martin and Farmer Bagley. The clear moonlight revealed an unpleasant expression on the older man's face in vivid contrast to the cast of the younger's. Bagley seemed rather slow to form a decision; all present suspected the cause of his hesitation.

"Fair's fair, Bagley!" called out an old farmer outside of the circle. "Don't belittle yorese'f by 'lowin' anything o' a personal natur' to come in an' influence you ag'in right. Dick Martin's the fust an' is entitled to the prize."

"Yore right, Wilson," admitted Bagley, with his eyes downcast. "Dick Martin is the winner an' kin proceed; howsomever, thar's some things that——"

> Salute yore bride an' kiss her sweet,
> Now you may rise upon yore feet!

sang the leader of the singers, completely drowning the remainder of Bagley's sentence. As quick as a flash of lightning Dick had thrown his arm round struggling Melissa and imprinted a warm kiss on her lips. Then the workers applauded vociferously, and Melissa sat, suffused with crimson, between sullen Bill Miller and beaming Dick Martin. Bagley showed plainly that Dick's action and the applause of all had roused his dislike for Dick even deeper than ever.

"I'm knowed to be a man o' my word," he fumed, white in the face and glancing round the ring of upturned faces. "I'm firm as firm kin be, I mought say as the rock o' Bralty, when I take a notion. I've heerd a leetle o' the talk in this settlement 'mongst some o' the meddlin' sort, an' fur fear this leetle accident mought add to the'r tattle I'd jest like to remark that ef thar's a man on the top side o' the earth that knows what's to be done with his own flesh an' blood it ort to be me. What's been the talk ain't so, not a speck of it. I've got somethin' to say to——"

"Paw!" expostulated Melissa, almost crying.

"Mr. Bagley—I say, Abrum Bagley, don't make a born fool o' yorese'f," broke in Mrs. Bagley, as she waddled into the circle and laid her hand heavily upon her husband's arm. "Now, folks, it's about time you wuz gittin' somethin' warm into you. You kin finish the pile atter you've eat. Come on, all hands, to the house!"

A shadow of mortification fell athwart Dick's honest face as soon as Bagley had spoken. His sensitive being was wounded to the core. As he and Melissa walked back to the farm house together, Bill Miller having dropped behind to gossip with someone over Bagley's remarks, he was silent, and timid Melissa was too shy to break the silence, although it was very painful to her.

Reaching the entrance to the farm house, Dick held back and refused to enter with the others.

"Ain't you gwine to come in an' have some supper?" Melissa asked, pleadingly.

"I ain't a-goin' narry nuther step. Anything cooked in this house would stick in my throat atter what's been said. He struck me a underhanded lick. I won't force myse'f on 'im nur to his table."

"I think you mought, bein' as I axed you," said she tremblingly, as she shrank into the honeysuckle vines that clung to the latticework of the entry.

"No, blame me ef I do!" he answered firmly. "I'm of as good stock as anybody in this county; nobody cayn't run no bull yearlin' dry shod over me."

All Melissa could do could not induce him to join the others in the dining room, and when he walked angrily away she ran into her own room, and sitting down in the darkness alone she burst into a flood of tears. After supper the guests repaired again to the corn heap, but Melissa was not among them, and the spirits of all seemed somewhat dampened.

After that night Dick Martin and Melissa Bagley did not meet each other for several days. However, on the Sunday following the corn shucking, as Melissa was returning from meeting through the woods alone, the very one who was uppermost in her troubled mind joined her. He emerged from the thick-growing bushes

which skirted her path, with a very pale face and unhappy mien.

“I jest couldn't wait another minute, Melissa,” he said, standing awkwardly before her, “not ef I had to be shot fur it.”

“Paw's mighty stubborn an' contrary when he takes a notion,” she said, with hanging head and an embarrassed kick of her foot at a tuft of grass. “I think he mought let me alone. You ain't the only one he hates. Thar's ol' man Lawson; law, he hates him wuss'n canker! I heerd 'im say tother day ef somebody 'u'd jest beat Lawson shootin' next match he'd be his friend till death. He ain't never got over his lawsuit with Lawson over the sheep our dog killed. Paw fit it in court through three terms, an' then had to give in an' settle the claim an' all the costs besides. It mighty nigh broke im. Fur the last five years Lawson has driv home the prize beef from the fall match, an' every time paw jest fairly shakes with madness over it.”

When Dick left Melissa at the bars in sight of her house and turned toward his home a warm idea was tingling in his brain, and by the time he had reached his father's cottage he was fairly afire with it. The shooting match was to take place in a month—what was to prevent him from taking part in it? He had an excellent rifle, and had done some good shooting at squirrels. Perhaps if he would practice a good deal he might win. Lawson was deemed the best marksman in all the Cohutta valleys, and frequently it had been hard to get anyone to enter a match against him. Dick at last decided to enter the forthcoming match at all events. He went into his cottage and took down his rifle from its deer-horn rack over the door. While he was eyeing the long, rusty barrel critically his old mother entered.

“Fixin' fur a hunt, Dick? Thar's a power o' pa'tridges in the sage field down the hollar. A rifle ain't as good fur that sort o' game as a shotgun; suppose you step over an' ax Hanson to loan you his'n?”

“I jest 'lowed I'd shine this un up a bit bein' as it's Sunday an' I hate to be idle,” he answered, evasively, as he seated himself at the wide fireplace with a pan of grease and a piece of cloth and rubbed his gun barrel until it fairly shone in the firelight. The next morning he threw it over his shoulder and, taking an axe in his hand, he started toward the woods.

“Didn't know but I mought find a bee tree somers,” he said sheepishly, as he saw his mother looking wonderingly at the axe. “Not likely, but I mought, thar's no tellin', though the darn little varmints do keep powerful close hid this time o' year.”

He went over the hills and through the tangled woods until he came to a secluded old field. He singled out a walnut tree near its centre, and going to it he cut a square white spot in the bark with his axe. It is needless to detail all that took place there that day, or on other days following it. For the first week the earnest fellow would return from this spot each afternoon with a very despondent look upon him. As time passed, however, and his visits to the riddled tree grew more frequent his face began to grow brighter.

Once his mother came suddenly upon him as he stood in the cottage before the open door with his rifle placed in position for firing. He lowered his gun with a deep blush.

“I 'us jest a tryin' to see how long I could keep the sight on that shiny spot out thar in the field without flinchin'. Blame me, ef you hadn't come in I believe I could a helt her thar tell it thundered.”

“Dick,” said the old woman, with a deep breath, “what on earth has got in you here lately? Are you gwine plump stark crazy 'bout that old gun? You never tuk on that way before.”

“I've jest found out I'm purty good on a shot, that's all,” he replied, evasively.

“Well,” said she, “as fur as that's concerned, in old times our stock was reckoned to be the best marksmen in our section. You ort to be; yore narrer 'twixt the eyes, an' that's a shore sign.”

Dick caught a glimpse of Melissa now and then, and managed to exchange a few words with her occasionally, the nature of which we will not disclose. It may be said, however, that she was always in good spirits, which puzzled her father considerably, for he was at a loss to see why she should be so when Dick had not visited her since the night of the corn shucking. Moreover, she continually roused her father's anger by speaking frequently of the great honor that belonged to Farmer Lawson for so often Winning the prizes in the shooting matches.

“Dang it, Melissa, dry up!” he exclaimed, boiling with anger, “you know I hate that daddrated man. I'd fling my hat as high as the moon ef some o' these young bucks 'u'd beat him this fall; he's as full o' brag as a lazy calf is with fleas.”

“No use a hopin' fur anything o' that sort, paw; Lawson's too old a han'. He ain't got his equal at shootin' ur lawin.' The whole country couldn't rake up a better one.” After speaking in this manner she would stifle a giggle by holding her hand over her mouth until she was livid in the face, and escape from her mystified parent, leaving him to vent his spleen on the empty air.

The day of the annual shooting match drew near. It was not known who were to be the participants aside from Lawson, for the others usually waited till the time arrived to announce their intentions. No better day could have been chosen. The sky was blue and sprinkled with frothy clouds, and the weather was not unpleasantly cold. Women and men, boys, girls and children from all directions were assembled to witness the sport and were seated in chairs and wagons all over the wide, open space.

Melissa was there in a cluster of girls, and her father was near by in a group of men, all of whom—like himself—disliked the blustering, boasting Lawson and fondly hoped that someone would beat him on this occasion. Lawson stood by himself, with a confident smile on his face. His rifle butt rested on the grass and his hands were folded across each other on the end of his gun barrel.

“Wilks,” said he to the clerk of the county court, who had been chosen as referee for the occasion, “git up yore list o' fellers that are bold enough to shoot agin the champion. I reckon my nerves are 'bout as they wuz six yeer ago when I fust took my stan' here to larn this settlement how to shoot.”

Just before the list of aspirants was read aloud Dick managed to reach Melissa's side unobserved by her father.

“Did you keep yore promise 'bout cut-tin' my patchin' fur me?” he asked in a whisper.

With trembling fingers she drew from her pocket several little pieces of white cotton cloth about the size of

a silver quarter of a dollar and gave them to him.

“They're jest right to a gnat's heel,” he said, warmly. “A ball packed in one o' them'll go straight ur I'm no judge.”

“Dick,” whispered she, looking him directly in the eyes, “you ain't a bit flustered. I believe you'll win.”

With a smile Dick turned away and joined the crowd round the referee's chair, and when his name was called a moment later among the names of four others he brought his rifle from a wagon and stood in view of the crowd. The first applause given that day was accorded him, for in addition to its being his first appearance in a shooting match he was universally popular.

“Bully fur you, Dick; here's my han' wishing you luck!” said a cheery-voiced farmer, shaking Dick's hand.

“It's the way with all these young strips,” said Lawson in a loud, boastful tone. “Gwine to conquer the whole round world. He'll grin on tother side o' his mouth when Bettie, the lead queen, barks and spits in the very centre o' that spot out yander.”

A feeble murmur of admiration greeted this vaunting remark, but it quickly subsided as the crowd noted that Dick Martin did not reply even by so much as to raise his eyes from the inspection of his gun. The referee called for order.

“Jim Baker,” said he, “be so kind as to drive round yore stall-fed heifer. Ladies an' gentlemen [as a man emerged from a group of wagons and drove a fine-looking young cow into the open space], here's a heifer in fine enough order to make any man's eyes sore to look. Fifteen round dollars has been paid in, by the five men who are to burn powder to-day, $3 apiece, an' the man whose shootin' iron can fling lead the straightest on this occasion is entitled to the beef and the championship o' this valley till next fall. Now, Mr. Baker, lead out yore cow, an' the shooters will please form in a line.”

When the aspirants stood in front of him the referee continued:

“Here is five pieces o' straw, all different lengths. The man who gets the shortest one shoots fust, the next longest next, an' so on till you've all had yore crack.”

Passing the straws to the riflemen, and af ter they had drawn one each from his tightly closed hands, he ordered a man to set up the target—a planed plank, about one foot in width and six in length, with a round marked spot about three inches in diameter, near the top.

“I'd willin'ly give my chance o' oats to have some o' them boys knock the stuffin' clean out'n Lawson; he's that stuck up he cayn't hardly walk,” said Bagley, his anger intensified by observing the sneering smile on Lawson's face.

“I'm mighty afeard,” said the man to whom Bagley was speaking, “that Dick Martin 'll lose his $3. I never heerd o' him bein' any han' with a gun.”

To this Bagley offered no reply. In his hatred for Lawson, and at such a time he had no thought to give to Dick.

“All ready!” rang out the voice of the referee. “Bob Ransom gits the first pull at trigger to-day.”

Silence fell on the crowd as the tall, slender young man stepped forth and stood with his left foot on a line cut in the grass exactly 100 yards from the tree against which the yellow board with its single eye leaned in the sunbeams. Not a whisper escaped the motionless assembly as the young man slowly brought his weapon into position. “Crack!” sounded the rifle out of a balloon-shaped cloud of blue smoke.

“Missed centre, board, tree an' all!” cried out Bagley, in a tone of deep regret.

“I seed yore lead plough up the dirt away out tother side; it's powerful hard to hold a steady han' when you are fust called on.”

“Next is Taylor Banks!” announced the referee; and as a middle-aged man advanced and toed the mark, Lawson was heard to say, with a loud laugh; “Fust one missed the tree; you folks on the left out thar 'u'd better set back fur-der; no tellin' who Banks 'll hit, fur he's a-tremblin' like so much jelly.”

“Hit about three inches due north o' the spot,” called out the referee, as the smoke rose from the peering marksman. “I'm afraid, Tayl', that somebody 'll come nigher than that when the pinch comes. Joe Burk is the next, an' I'll take occasion to say here that I know of no man in all this mountain country that is more prompt to pay his taxes.”

“Crack!” A universal bending of necks to get the target in better view and a rolling billow of voices in the crowd.

“A inch an' a half below the spot!” proclaimed the referee. “Why, friends, what ails you all? This ain't nigh such shootin' as we had last fall. Too many women present, I reckon. Ladies, if you'll cover up yore faces maybe the next two will do better. The straws say that Abraham Lawson has the next whack. Lawson, make yore bow.”

The champion of the settlement stepped into view with a haughty strut, dragging his rifle butt on the ground and swinging his broad-brimmed hat carelessly in his hand. Turning to a negro behind him as he took his place, he said so that all could hear:

“Tobe, git yore rope ready an' stan' over thar nigh the beef. When you git 'er home turn 'er in the pastur'. Ef this thing goes on year atter year I'll start a cattle ranch an' quit farmin'.”

“Dang his hide!” exclaimed Bagley to Melissa, who was very pale and quite speechless. “Dang it, I'd lay this here right arm on any man's meat block an' give 'im leave to chop it off ef he'd jest git beat. He's that spiled flies is on 'im.”

Lawson's hat was now on the grass at his feet and he had deliberately raised his brightly-polished weapon to his broad shoulder. The sun glittered on the long steel tube. The silence for an instant was so profound that the birds could be heard singing in the woods and the cawing of the crows in the corn fields near by sounded harsh to the ear. For an instant the sturdy champion stood as if molded in metal, his long hair falling over his gun stock, against which his tanned cheek was closely pressed. Not a sound passed the lips of the assembly, and when the rifle report came it sent a twinge to many a heart.

“Dang it!” ejaculated Lawson, as he lowered his gun and peered through the rising smoke toward the target. “I felt a unsteady quiver tech me jest as I pulled the trigger.”

“About half an inch from the very centre o' the mark. Yore ahead. Nobody is likely to come up to you, Lawson,” said the referee. “The' ain't but one more.”

“I don't keer,” replied Lawson. “I know the cow's mine; but I did want to come up to my record. I walked too fast over here an' it made me unsteady.”

“The next an' last candidate for glory,” said the referee, “is Dick Martin. No cheerin', friends, it ain't been give to the others and you oughtn't to show partiality. Besides, it might excite him, an' he needs all the nerve he's got.”

Bagley was still at Melissa's side. He had his eyes too intently fixed on the stalwart form of Dick Martin and the young man's pale, determined visage to note that his daughter had covered her pale face with her cold, trembling hands and bowed her head.

“By Jinks! he's the coolest cucumber that's lifted shootin' iron to-day,” said Bagley under his breath. “Ef he beats Lawson dagg me if I don't give him a dance in my barn an' invite every man, woman an' child in the whole valley.” With his left foot on the mark and his right thrown back easily, as if he were taking a step forward, and his well-formed body bent slightly toward the target, Dick stood motionless, sighting along his gun barrel at the target. Then, to the surprise of all, he raised his gun until it pointed to the top of the tree against which the target leaned. Here a gentle sigh, born from the union of half surprise and half disappointment, swept over the crowd as low as the whisper of a breeze through a dry foliaged tree. The sigh died away and intense silence claimed the moment, for the gun's point was sweeping rapidly downward. Hardly a second did it pause in a line with the target's centre before the report came, putting every breast in sudden motion. The marker's eyes saw a clean splinter fly from the very centre of the round.

“The beef is won by Dick Martin!” loudly proclaimed the referee.

“Whoopee! Glory! Glory!” The shout was from the lips of Bagley, and in an instant he had stridden across to Dick with outstretched hand. “Glory, Glory! Dick!” he exclaimed; “le'me have a hold o' yore fist. Tell judgment day I'm yore friend. I've said some sneakin' underhand things about you that's hurt yore feelin's an' I want to ax yore pardon. Dang it! I cayn't harbor no ill will agin a feller that's beat Abrum Lawson a-shootin'. Thank goodness you've fetched his kingdom to a end!”

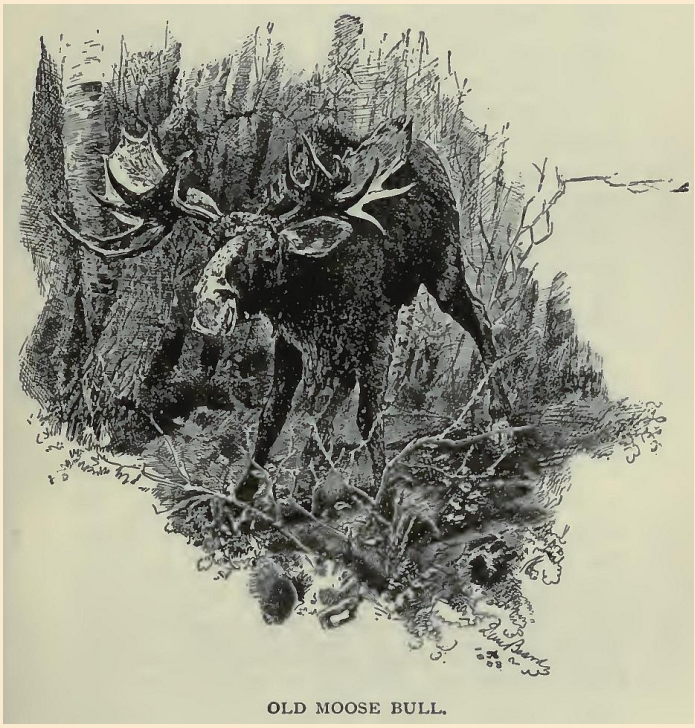
When down-fallen Lawson had slunk away unnoticed from the enthusiastic crowd who were eager to congratulate Dick, Bagley came up to him and said:

“Dick, le'me have the honor o' drivin' the prize home fur you. Fur some reason ur other you didn't stay to supper with us corn-shuckin' night; Melissa's a waitin' fur you out thar in the bresh to ax you to come home with us to-night. By glory, Tobe,” turning to Lawson's negro, “this yer's the same identical beef Lawson ordered you to drive home an' put in his pastur', ain't it? Well, you jest tell 'im his friend Bagley tuk the job off'n yore han's.”

MOERAN'S MOOSE—A HUNTING STORY, By Ed. W. Sandys.

ONE of the best fellows among the hardy lot who have ran the trails and paddled the lonely tributaries of the tipper Ottawa was Moeran. No bolder sportsman ever went into the woods, and few, or none of the guides or professional hunters could rival his skill with rifle or paddle. The tough old "Leatherstockings" fairly idolized him, for he got his game as they did, by straight shooting, perfect woodcraft, and honest hard work; and most of them, while they usually charged a heavy price for their services, would have gladly thrown in their lots with him for an outing of a month or more, and asked nothing save what he considered a fair division of the spoils. He was also a keen observer and a close student of the ways of bird and beast. The real pleasure of sport seemed to him to lie in the fact that it brought him very near to nature, and permitted him to pore at will over that marvelous open page which all might read if they chose, yet which few pause to study. His genial disposition and long experience made him ever a welcome and valuable companion afield or afloat, and the comrades he shot with season after season would have as soon gone into the woods without their rifles as without Moeran. Physically, he was an excellent type of the genuine sportsman. Straight and tall, and strongly made, his powerful arms could make a paddle spring, if need be, or his broad shoulders bear a canoe or pack over a portage that taxed even the rugged guides; and his long limbs could cover ground in a fashion that made the miles seem many and long to whoever tramped a day with him.

And this was the kind of man that planned a trip for a party of four after the lordly moose. Moeran had, until that year, never seen a wild moose free in his own forest domain, and needless to say he was keenly anxious to pay his respects to the great king of the Canadian wilderness. He had been in the moose country many times while fishing or shooting in the provinces of New Brunswick, Quebec, Ontario and Manitoba; he had seen the slots of the huge deer about pool and stream, on beaver meadow and brule; he had spent more than one September night "calling," with a crafty Indian to simulate the plaintive appeals of a love-lorn cow; he had heard the great bulls answer from the distant hills—had heard even the low, grunting inquiry a bull moose generally makes ere emerging from the last few yards of shadowy cover, and revealing himself in all his mighty strength and pride in the moonlit open. More than once he had lain quivering with excitement and hardly daring to breathe, close-hidden in a little clump of scrub, about which stretched full forty yards of level grass on every side—lain so for an hour with every nerve strained to the ready, with ears striving to catch the faintest sound on the stillness of the night, and with eyes sweeping warily over the expanse of moonlit grass and striving vainly to pierce the black borders of forest, somewhere behind which his royal quarry was hidden. Upon such occasions he had lain and listened and watched until he fancied he could see the moose standing silently alert among the saplings, with ears shifting to and fro and with keen nose searching the air ceaselessly for trace of his mortal enemy. The occasional distant rattle of broad antlers against the trees as the big brute shook himself or plunged about in lusty strength had sounded on his ears, followed by the faint sounds of cautiously advancing footsteps seemingly bent straight toward the ambush. Then would follow a long agonizing pause, and then a snap of a twig or a faint rustling told that the crafty bull was stealing in a circle through the cover around the open space before venturing upon such dangerous ground.



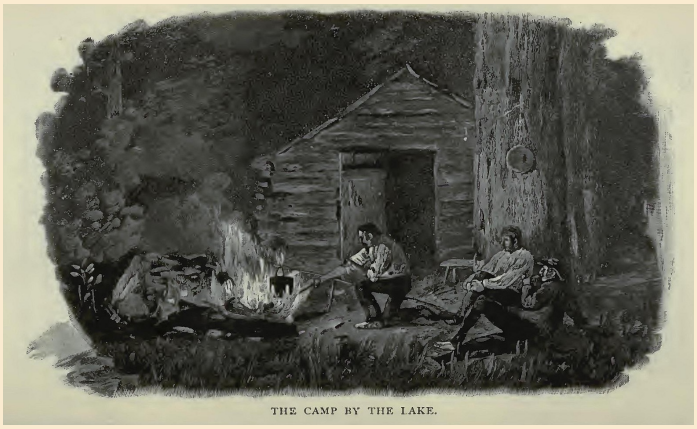
OLD MOOSE BULL.

At last a deathlike silence for many minutes, and then a faint, far snap of twigs and "wish" of straightening branches as the great bull stole away to his forested hills, having read in breeze or on ground a warning of the foe concealed in the harmless scrub. All these were disappointments, but not necessarily bitter ones. The long night-vigils were after all rarely spent entirely in vain, for each brought to him some new ideas, or let him a little further into the dark mysteries of the great wild world's nightly moods and methods. The skilled craft of his Indian "caller;" the strange voices of the night that came to his ears, telling of the movements of creatures but seldom seen or heard by day, were full of interest to a genuine woodsman. And then the fierce

though subdued excitement of the weird watch for the huge beast that never came, and yet might come at any moment full into the silvery moonlight from out the black belt of silent wood—these were each fascinating to such a nature as his. But still he had never once seen his long-looked-for game, though several seasons had slipped away and the month of July, 18——, had come and half passed by. Then Moeran got ready his fishing tackle and camping gear and vowed to find a good district for the party to shoot over the coming season, even if he had to remain in the woods an entire month. Right well he knew some of the likeliest points in New Brunswick, Quebec and Manitoba, the eastern portion of the latter province being the best moose country now available, but none of them met the requirements of the party, and so he decided to go into northern Ontario and prospect until he found what he sought.

In the region of the upper Ottawa River, and in the wild lands about the Mattawa River and about the lakes forming its headwaters, is a country beloved of moose. Thither went Moe-ran, satisfied that his quest would not be in vain. Early in the third week of July he and his Peterboro canoe and outfit reached the railway station of North Bay, on the shore of noble Lake Nipissing. While awaiting the arrival of the guide and team for the next stage of his journey, he put rod together and strolled out on the long pier which extends for a considerable distance into the lake. Reaching the farther end and looking down into the clear, green depths below, he saw watchful black bass skulking in the shadows, and lazy pickerel drifting hither and thither, in and out, among the great piles which supported the pier. To tempt a few of these to their doom was an easy task, and soon the lithe rod was arching over a game black gladiator and a master hand was meeting every desperate struggle of a fighting fish, or slowly raising a varlet pickerel to his inglorious death. In time a hail announced the arrival of the team, and after presenting his captives to the few loungers on the pier, he busied himself stowing canoe and outfit upon the wagon.

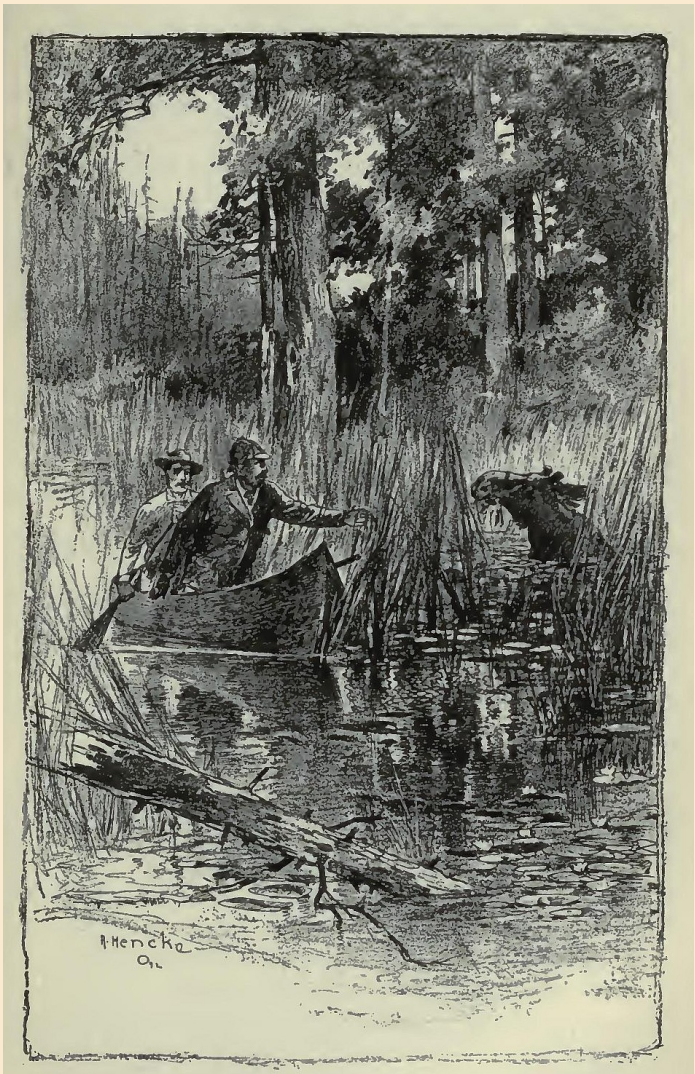
Their objective point was on the shore of Trout Lake, a lovely sheet of water distant from Nipissing about four miles. The road was in many places extremely bad and the team made slow progress, but there was plenty of time to spare and about noon they reached the lake. The guide, as guides are given to do, lied cheerfully and insistently every yard of the way, about the beauty of the lake, the countless deer and grouse upon its shores, the gigantic fish within its ice-cold depths, the game he, and parties he had guided, had killed, and the fish they had caught. He did well with these minor subjects, but when he touched upon moose and bear he rose to the sublime, and lied with a wild abandon which made Moeran seriously consider the advantage of upsetting the canoe later on and quietly drowning him. But he was not so far astray in his description of the lake. It formed a superb picture, stretching its narrow length for a dozen miles between huge, rolling, magnificently wooded hills, while here and there lovely islands spangled its silver breast. After a hurried lunch they launched the good canoe, the guide insisting upon taking his rifle, as, according to his story, they were almost certain to see one or more bear. The guide proved that he could paddle almost as well as he could lie, and the two of them drove the light craft along like a scared thing, the paddles rising and falling, flashing and disappearing, with that beautiful, smooth, regular sweep that only experts can give. For mile after mile they sped along, until at last they neared the farther end of the lake, where the huge hills dwindled to mere scattered mounds, between which spread broad beaver meadows, the nearest of them having a pond covering many acres near its center. All about this pond was a dense growth of tall water-grasses, and in many places these grasses extended far into the water which was almost covered, save a few open leads, with the round, crowding leaves of the water-lily. A channel, broad and deep enough to float the canoe, connected this pond with the lake, and, as the locality was an ideal summer haunt for moose, Moeran decided to investigate it thoroughly and read such “sign” as might be found. Landing noiselessly, he and the guide changed places, Moeran kneeling, forward, with the rifle on the bottom of the canoe in front of him, where he alone could reach it. “Now,” he whispered, “you know the route and how to paddle; work her up as if a sound would cost your life. I'll do the watching.”



THE CAMP BY THE LAKE.

Slowly, silently, foot by foot, and sometimes inch by inch, the canoe stole up the currentless channel, the guide never raising his paddle, but pushing with it cautiously against the soft bottom and lily-roots. It was a good piece of canoe work, worthy even of Moeran's noted skill, and he thoroughly appreciated it. By motions of his hand he indicated when to halt and advance, while his eyes scanned sharply every yard of marsh revealed by the windings of the channel. Not the slightest sound marked their progress until they had almost entered the open water in the center of the pond, and were creeping past the last fringe of tall grass. Suddenly Moeran's hand signaled a halt, and the canoe lost its slow, forward motion. He looked and looked, staring fixedly at a point some twenty yards distant, where the growth of grass was thin and short and the lily-pads denser than usual, and as he gazed with a strange concentration, a wild light flashed in his eyes until

they fairly blazed with exultant triumph. Straight before him among the faded greens and bewildering browns of the lily-pads was a motionless, elongated brown object very like the curved back of a beaver, and a foot or more from it, in the shadow of a clump of grass, something shone with a peculiar liquid gleam. It was an eye—a great, round, wild eye—staring full into his own—the eye of a moose—and the curving object like the back of a beaver was naught else than the enormous nose, or muffle, of a full-grown bull. Something like a sigh came from it, and then it slowly rose higher and higher until the head and neck were exposed. The big ears pointed stiffly forward, and the nose twitched and trembled for an instant as it caught the dreaded taint; then with a mighty floundering and splashing the great brute struggled to his feet. It was a grewsome spectacle to see this uncouth creature uprise from a place where it seemed a muskrat could hardly have hidden. For a few seconds he stood still.



"IT SLOWLY ROSE HIGHER AND HIGHER."

"Shoot! Shoot!"

Moeran simply picked up the rifle and brought it level.

"Load! 'Tain't loaded—the lever—quick!"

He made no response, merely covered, first the point of the shoulder and then the ear, and then, as the bull plunged for the shore, he covered the shoulder twice more, then lowered the rifle, while a horribly excited guide cursed and raved and implored by turns in vain. And just how great was the temptation was never known, but it certainly would have proved irresistible to most men who call themselves sportsmen. In speaking about it afterward Moeran said: "It would have been a crime to have murdered the beast under such conditions, and out of season. I covered him fair four times, and could have dropped him dead where he stood—but we'll attend to them later on." For there were, in all, four moose in the pond, and, shortly after the big bull commenced his noisy retreat, a tremendous splashing and plunging from the other side of the pond attracted their attention. They turned just in time to see a grand old cow and two younger moose struggle through the last few yards of mud and water, and then crash their way into the cover at the rapid, pounding trot peculiar to the species.

Moeran's mission had been accomplished much easier than was expected, and he certainly had discovered a most promising locality for the trip with his friends. After a day spent fishing, he departed homeward, leaving his canoe and camp outfit in charge of the guide, whom he also bound by most solemn pledge neither to betray the secret of the beaver meadow, nor to molest the moose himself, before Moeran and his friends returned in time for the first lawful day.

The last day of the close season saw the party and the guide snugly encamped at a point half-way down the lake. His three friends had unanimously agreed that Moeran should have the honor of visiting the beaver meadow first, and alone if he desired. He was the surest shot and by far the best hand at this sort of business, and he had discovered the moose, while all hands knew how keen he was to secure a head to his own rifle. So at earliest dawn Moeran put lunch and rifle into his shapely Peterboro and sped noiselessly away through the ghostly vapors curtaining the sleeping lake, and they saw him no more for many hours. The guide had questioned the others about their comrade's shooting (of his ability at the paddle he had somewhat sorrowful remembrance), and then, strange to say, had advised Moeran to go alone.

“So much more glory for you,” he said, “and I'll look after these other gentlemen and give them a day's fishing.” But his manner was shifty, and Moeran mistrusted him.

In due time he reached the little channel leading to the beaver meadow, and, as the sun lifted clear of the distant hills, he began working his way to the pond. He hardly expected to find the moose there then, but he had made up his mind to steal into the high grass and hide and watch all day, if necessary, and, at all events, study the thing out thoroughly. As the sun rose higher a brisk breeze sprang up, but as it came from the woods toward his station he did not mind, although it would have been fatal to his chance, probably, had it come from any other point of the compass. Presently his nose detected a strong, sickening odor of carrion, which, in time, as the breeze gained force, became almost overpowering, and he started to investigate. Paddling straight up-wind he came at last to a small pool, and the trouble was explained. The half-decomposed body of a full-grown cow moose lay in the pool and Moeran muttered savagely his opinion of all such butchery when he saw that not even the feet had been taken for trophies. Then he poled his canoe to the edge of the meadow and scouted carefully entirely round the open, seeking for any possible sign of the remainder of the quartet. To his utter disgust he found the remains of another moose, one of the younger animals, lying just within the borders of the cover, and, as in the other case, the butcher had not troubled himself to take away any portion of his victim. Moeran understood, of course, that the guide had played him false, and if that worthy had been present he might have seriously regretted his wrong-doing, for he it was who had guided a learned and honorable (?) American judge to the sanctuary of the moose a month previously, and, for a consideration of twenty-five dollars, enabled his patron to gratify his taste for the shambles.

Moeran's careful search discovered no fresh sign, and he made up his mind that the two survivors, the old bull and the yearling, had fled the scene and had probably sought another expanse of beaver meadow and ponds the guide had mentioned as being about ten miles from Trout Lake. Moeran knew that some sort of a trail led thither, and he resolved to find it and follow it to the end and endeavor to locate the moose.

Of the ensuing long, hard day's work it will be unnecessary to speak in detail.

At nine o'clock that night his three friends sat near their roaring camp-fire on the lake shore, wondering at his protracted absence. The guide had turned in an hour previous, but the three were anxious, so they sat and smoked, and discussed the question, piling great drift-logs on their fire till it roared and cracked in fierce exultation and leaped high in air to guide the wanderer home. Its long, crimson reflection stretched like a pathway of flame far over the black waters of the lake, and the three sat and waited, now glancing along this glowing path, anon conversing in subdued tones. The lake was as still and dark as a lake of pitch, and some way the three felt ill at ease, as though some evil impended. At last the veteran of the trio broke a longer silence than usual:

“Boys, I don't like this. It's ten o'clock and he should have been back long ago. I hope to Heaven——”

A touch on his arm from the man at his right caused him to glance quickly lakeward.

Forty feet from them, drifting noiselessly into the firelight, was the Peterboro, with Moeran kneeling as usual and sending the light craft forward in some mysterious manner which required no perceptible movement of the arms nor lifting of the paddle. It was a fine exhibition of his skill to thus approach unheard three anxious, listening men on such a night, for he had heard their voices good two miles away. His appearance was so sudden, so ghostlike, that for a few seconds the party stared in mute surprise at the forms of man and craft standing out in sharp relief against the blackness of the night; then a whoop of delight welcomed him.

He came ashore, swiftly picked up the canoe and turned it bottom upward on the sand for the night, carried his rifle into camp, then approached the fire and looked sharply round.

“The guide's asleep.”

“Oh, he is; ———— him!” Then he flung himself down on the sand. Something in his tone and manner warned his friends not to talk, and they eyed him curiously. His face was white as death and drawn with an expression of utter exhaustion, and marked with grimy lines, showing where rivulets of sweat had trickled downward. As they looked, his eyes closed; he was going to sleep as he lay.

Quietly the veteran busied himself getting food ready, and presently roused the slumberer.

“Here, old chap, have a nip and eat a bite. Why, you're dead beat. Where on earth have you been?”

A strangely hollow voice answered:

“To the back lakes.”

His listeners whistled a combined long-drawn “whew” of amazement, for right well they knew the leagues of toilsome travel this statement implied.

“See anything?”

“Wounded the old bull badly, and trailed him from the lakes to within five miles of here. That cur sleeping yonder sold us; but you hear me!” he exclaimed with sudden fierce energy, “*I'll get that moose if I have to stay in the woods forever!*”

The three looked at him in admiring silence, for they guessed that, in spite of his terrible day's work, he intended starting again at daylight. In a few moments he finished his meal and staggered to the tent, and fell asleep as soon as he touched his blanket.

When the party turned out next morning the canoe was gone, though the sun was not yet clear, of the hills. After breakfast they started in quest of grouse, working through the woods in the direction of the beaver meadows, and finding plenty of birds. About ten o'clock they heard the distant report of a rifle, followed in a few minutes by a second, and the veteran exclaimed, “That's him, for an even hundred, and he's got his moose, or something strange has happened.”

At noon they returned to camp laden with grouse. No sign of the canoe as yet, so they had dinner, and lounged about and fished during the afternoon, casting many expectant glances down the lake for the laggard canoe. Night fell, with still no sound or sign of the wanderer, and again the camp-fire roared and flamed and sent its glowing reflection streaming far over the black waste of water. And again the three sat waiting. At ten o'clock the veteran rose and said, “Keep a sharp lookout, boys, and don't let him fool you again, and I'll get up a royal feed. He'll have moose-meat in the canoe this time, for he said *he'd get that moose if he had to stay in the woods forever*. He'll be dead beat, sure, for he's probably dragged the head out with him.” So they waited, piling the fire high, and staring out over the lake for the first glimpse of the canoe. Eleven o'clock and midnight came and went, and still no sign. Then they piled the fire high for the last time and sought the tent. At the door the veteran halted, and laying a hand on the shoulder of his chum, drew him aside.

“Why, whatever's the matter with you?”

The old man's face wore a piteous expression, and his voice trembled as he whispered:

“Hush! Don't let *him* hear you—but there's something wrong. Something horrible has happened—I feel it in my heart.”

“Nonsense, man! You're sleepy and nervous. He's all right. Why, he's just cut himself a moose steak, and had a feed and laid down——”

The sentence was never completed. A sound that caused both men to start convulsively tore through the black stillness of the night. A horrible, gurgling, demoniacal laugh came over the lake, and died away in fading echoes among the hills. “Woll-oll-all-ollow-wall-all-ollow!” as though some hideous fiend was laughing with his lips touching the water. They knew what it was, for the loon's weird cry was perfectly familiar to them, and they laughed too, but there was no mirth in their voices. Then one sought the tent, but the veteran paced up and down upon the cold beach, halting sometimes to replenish the fire or to stare out over the water, until a pale light spread through the eastern sky. Then he too turned in for a couple of hours of troubled, unrefreshing slumber.

The bright sunshine of an Indian summer's day brought a reaction and their spirits rose wonderfully; but still the canoe tarried, and as the hours wore away, the veteran grew moody again and the midday meal was a melancholy affair. Early in the afternoon he exclaimed:

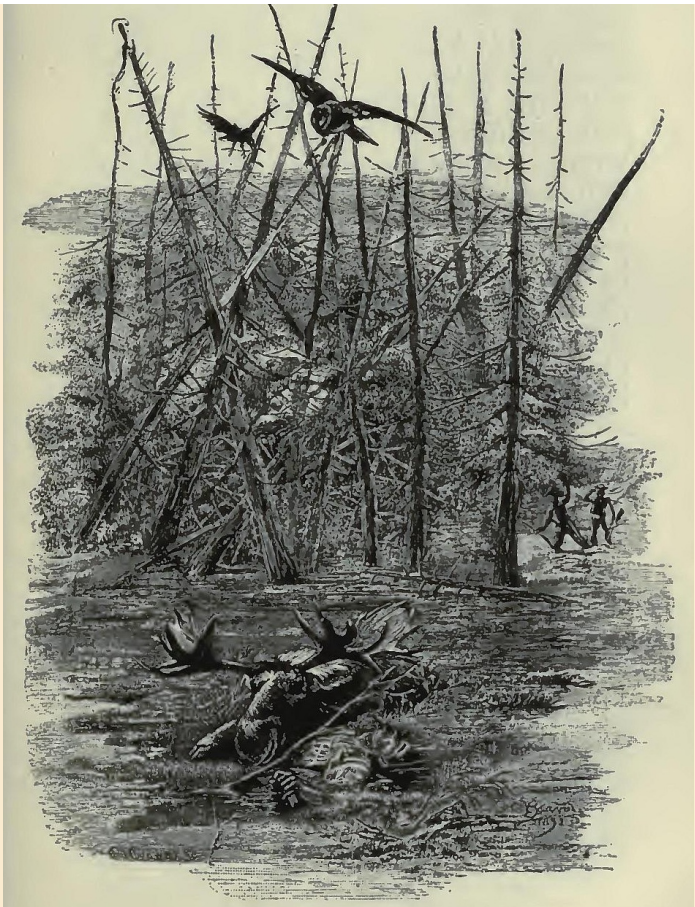
“Boys, I tell you what it is: I can stand this no longer—something's wrong, and we're going to paddle those two skiffs down to the beaver meadow and find out what we can do, and we're going to start right now. God forgive us if we have been idling here while we should have been yonder!”

Two in a boat they went, and the paddles never halted until the channel to the beaver meadow was gained. Dividing forces, they circled in opposite directions round the open, but only the taint of the long-dead moose marked the spot. Then they fired three rifles in rapid succession and listened anxiously, but only the rolling, bursting echoes of the woods answered them.

“Guide, where would he probably have gone?”

“Wa'al, he told you he'd run the old bull this way from the back lakes—thar's another leetle mash a mile north of us; it's an awful mud-hole, and the bull might possibly hev lit out fur thar. Enyhow, we'd best hunt the closest spots first.”

The picture of that marsh will haunt the memories of those three men until their deaths. A few acres of muskeg, with broad reaches of sullen, black, slimy water, its borders bottomless mud, covered with a loathsome green scum, and a few pale-green, sickly-looking larches dotting the open—the whole forming a repulsive blemish, like an ulcer, on the face of the earth. All round rose a silent wall of noble evergreens, rising in massive tiers upon the hills, with here and there a flame of gorgeous color where the frost had touched perishable foliage. Overhead a hazy dome of dreamy blue, with the sun smiling down through the gauzy curtains of the Indian summer. Swinging in easy circles, high in air, were two ravens, challenging each other in hollow tones, their orbits crossing and recrossing as they narrowed in slow-descending spirals. “Look, look at him!”



"LOOK, LOOK AT HIM!"

One bird had stooped like a falling plummet, and now hung about fifty yards above the farther bounds of the muskeg, beating the air with heavy, sable pinions and croaking loudly to his mate above. Closing her wings, she stooped with a whizzing rush to his level, and there the two hung flapping side by side, their broad wings sometimes striking sharply against each other, their hoarse, guttural notes sounding at intervals. A nameless horror seized the men as they looked. Their hunter's instinct told them that death lay below those flapping birds, and with one impulse they hurried round on the firmer ground to the ill-omened spot.

The veteran, white-faced but active as a lad, tore his way through the bordering cover first, halted and stared for an instant, then dropped his rifle in the mud, threw up his hands and exclaimed in an agonized voice:

"Oh, my God, my God!"

One by one they crashed through the brush and joined him, and stood staring. No need for questions. Ten square yards of deep-trodden, reeking mud and crushed grass, a trampled cap, and here and there a rag of brown duck; a silver-mounted flask shining in a little pool of bloody water; a stockless rifle-barrel, bent and soiled, sticking upright; beyond all a huge, hairy body, and below it a suggestion of another body and a blood-stained face, that even through its terrible disfigurement seemed to scowl with grim determination. Throwing off their coats, they dragged the dead moose aside and strove to raise Moeran's body, but in vain. Something held it; the right leg was broken and they found the foot fast fixed in a forked root the treacherous slime had concealed. In the right hand was firmly clutched the haft of his hunting knife, and in the moose's throat was the broken blade. The veteran almost smiled through his tears as they worked to loosen the prisoned foot, and muttered, "Caught like a bear in a trap; he'd have held his own with a fair chance." Carrying the poor, stamped, crushed body to the shade, they laid it upon the moss and returned to read the story of the fearful battle. To their hunter's eyes it read as plainly as printed page. The great bull, sore from his previous wound, had sought the swamp. Moeran had trailed him to the edge and knocked him down the first shot, and after reloading had run forward to bleed his prize. Just as he got within reach the bull had struggled up and charged, and Moeran had shot him through the second time. Then he had apparently dodged about in the sticky mud and struck the bull terrific blows with the clubbed rifle, breaking the stock and bending the barrel, and getting struck himself repeatedly by the terrible forefeet of the enraged brute. To and fro, with ragged clothes and torn flesh, he had dodged, the deadly muskeg behind and on either side, the furious bull holding the only path to the saving woods. At last he had entrapped his foot in the forked root, and the bull had rushed in and beaten him down, and as he fell he struck with his knife ere the tremendous weight crushed out his life. The veteran picked up the rifle-barrel, swept it through a pool and examined the action, and found a shell jammed fast.

In despairing voice he said, "Oh, boys, boys, if that shell had but come into place our friend had won the day, but he died like the noble fellow he was!"

With rifles and coats they made a stretcher and carried him sadly out to the lake.

"*He would get that moose, or stay in the woods forever!*"

THE MYSTERY OF A CHRISTMAS HUNT, By Talbot Torrance

“Clug!” The wad went home in the last shell, and as I removed it from the loader and finished the fill of my belt I heaved a sigh of profound relief at the completion of a troublesome job.

I hate making cartridges. Perhaps I am a novice, and have not a good kit, and am lazy, and clumsy, and impatient, and—— But go on and account for it yourself at greater length, if you will, my friends; only accept my solemn statement that I detest the operation, which, I am convinced, ought to be confined to able-bodied colored men with perseverance and pachydermatous knuckles.

An ordinary man is always in fluster and fever before he completes loading up for a day's gunning. His patent plugger becomes inexplicably and painfully fractious; his percussions are misfits; his No. 10 wads prove to be No. 12s; his shot sack is sure to spill; his canister is certain to sustain a dump into the water pail, and, when he begins to reflect on all the unmentionable *lapsi linguæ* of which his numerous vexations are the immediately exciting, though possibly not the responsible, cause, he is apt to conclude that, say what you may in favor of the breechloader, there are a certain few points which commend the old-time muzzle-loader, especially when it comes around to charging a shell.

“A TROUBLESOME JOB.”

At all events, that is the kind of man I now am; and if the reader is not prepared to absolutely indorse me all through these crotchety cogitations, may I not hope he will at least bear with me patiently and give me time to outgrow it, if possible? But, as I was saying, I have charged up and am ready to sally forth and join the hunting party of the Blankville Gun Club, who had organized a match for Christmas Eve, a bright, nippy day of “an open winter”—as experienced in Northeastern Ontario, at any rate. I don my game bag, strap on my belt, pick up my newly-bought hammerless and prepare to leave the house. My cocker Charlie, long since cognizant of what my preparations meant, is at heel.

There is a wild light in his eyes, but, self-contained animal that he is, not a yelp, whine or even tail wag is manifested to detract from his native dignity and self possession. “Native” dignity? Aye! My dog boasts it naturally; and yet, at the same time, I fancy the switch and I have had something to do in developing it and teaching the pup its apparently unconscious display.

"YOU'RE NO FOOL DOG, ARE YOU, CHARLIE?"

"You're no fool dog, are you, Charlie? You're no funny, festive, frolicsome dog, who cannot hold himself in when a run is on the programme—eh, boy?"

The silky-coated canine knows as well as I do that he is in for an afternoon a-wood. He has the inclination to leap and roll and essay to jump out of his hide. Yet the only answer he dare give to the inquiry is an appealing glance from his hazel orbs up at his master's immovable face. Yes, my dog Charlie is sober and sensible, and I am proud of these characteristics and their usefulness to me before the gun.

"WILL MISS YOUR WELCOME FOOT-STEPS."

"Good-bye, little woman!" I sing out cheerily to my wife as I pass down the hall. She comes to the door to see me off. Sometimes, perhaps, a man will find his adieu on an occasion of this kind responded to uncordially, not to say frigidly, or perhaps not at all. But he must not grieve deeply over it or let it act as an excitative of his mean moroseness or angry passion. Think the thing all over. You are to be far away from home. Why should not the thought of the vacant chair—next to that of the demonstrative and exacting baby at meal time—rise up and sadden your wife? Can you wonder at her distant bearing as she foresees how she will sigh "for the touch of a vanished hand"—on the coal scuttle and water pail? Of course, she will "miss your welcome footsteps"—carrying in kindlings, and the "dear, familiar voice"—calling up the chickens. And so you cannot in reason expect her invariably to answer your kindly *adios* in a gladsome, gleesome, wholly satisfied sort of way. But never you go away without the goodbye on your part—the honest, manly, loving-toned good-bye that will ring in her ears in your absence and cause her to fancy that perhaps you are not such a selfish old bear after all.

With some of us men—only a limited few, of course, and we are not inclined to think over and enumerate them—it is unhappily the case that

> We have cheerful words for the stranger,
> And smiles for the sometime guest;
> But oft for our own the bitter tone,
> Though we love our own the best.

"will miss your welcome footsteps."

"WILL MISS YOUR WELCOME FOOT-STEPS."

Now, if such men only thought
How many go forth in the morning,
Who never come back at night!
And hearts are broken for harsh words spoken,
Which time may never set right,

what a different atmosphere might permeate the domicile on "first days," to say nothing of the rest of the time!

The real fact of the matter is, men and brothers, we do not accurately appreciate the objections which the domestic partners may entertain against our occasional outings. For my part I verily believe they are largely, if not entirely, prompted by the feeling that

There's nae luck aboot the hoose,
There's nae luck at a'!
There's nae luck about the hoose,
Since oor guid mon's avva'.

And here we go on thinking it is purely a matter of petty petulance and small selfishness on their part! Come, gentlemen, let us once and for all rightly appreciate the situation and resolve to do better in the future! But let us return to our sheep. My hand is on the door knob, when, pit-a-pat, pit-a-pat, is heard the tread of tiny feet. It is Ted, my little two year old, coming to say good-bye to papa. I take him up and sing gaily:

Bye, baby bunting,
Papa goes a-hunting,
To get a little rabbit skin
To wrap the baby bunting in.

How the little man crows and gurgles in glee! Then he grows demonstrative and he wants to take off my cap. He makes a grab at my game bag. As I put him down gently he tries to disarm me and possess himself of the gun.

I say, what an awful bother about the house of the sportsman is the toddling tot of a baby! He is always getting hold of your gun swab for a fish pole or to bang the dog about. Putting holes in your fish basket with a big nail or a table knife is a supreme source of delight to him. He has a mania for planting carpet tacks in

your hunting boots. Making smokestacks for mud houses with your brass shells is a passion with him. If he can get hold of your ammunition to make paste of the powder, and pulp of the wads, and a hopeless mixture of the shot, he is simply in his element. Give him possession of your lines and access to your fly book and he enjoys an hour of what is, to him, immense fun, but to you pronounced and positive destruction.

And yet—you wouldn't be without, that self-same baby if to keep him cost you every shooting iron and foot of tackle you ever owned or hoped to own, and at the same time destroyed the prospect of you ever again having a “day out” on this rare old earth of ours.

It is quite safe to say that the article for which you would exchange that merry, mischievous toddler of yours, who clasps your brown neck with little white, soft arms and presses a sweet baby kiss to your bristled lips, as he sees you off on an outing, has not now an existence—and you do not seem to exactly remember when it had. And you do not care whether he destroys your possessions; they can be replaced.

Yes, indeed! Even you, most inveterate and selfish and calloused votary of the chase—you have a tender spot in your hard old heart for the baby boy. He may not be all that is orderly, obedient, non-combatable, non-destructive, but still we all love him! Not one of us, at all events, but will frankly admit that we respect him—for his father's sake. Need anything more be said?

And do not we also respect those who depict him in tenderness and affection?

Don't we think all the more of Scanlon the actor for his inimitable “Peek-a-boo?” and of Charles Mackay for his “Baby Mine?” and of Bret Harte for his “Luck of Roaring Camp?” and of Dickens—wasn't it Dickens who wrote:

> When the lessons and tasks all are ended,
> And the school for the day is dismissed,
> And the little ones gather around me
> To bid me good-bye and be kissed.
> Oh, the little, white arms that encircle
> My neck in a tender embrace!
> Oh, the smiles that are halos of Heaven
> Shedding light in a desolate place!

Has it ever occurred to you, my friend, that the baby is the same unchanged, unimproved article since the world began? Men are making smokeless powder, constructing pneumatic bicycle tires, inventing long-distance guns, training horses down to two minutes, getting sprinters to cover 100 yards close to nine seconds—revolutionizing everything, but leaving the baby the old-time brand!

People seem satisfied with the original make, and far from any movement to abolish it as out of date. The sentiment would appear to be pretty universal:

> Drear were the world without a child,
> Where happy infant never smiled.
> We sooner could the flowerets spare,
> The tender bud and blossom fair,
> Or breath of spring time in the air.

I have said “bye-bye” to my tiny Ted half a dozen times and at last am about to escape during his sudden flight to another part of the house, when I am arrested by the eager cry, half in inquiry, half in jubilation, “Baby barlo! Papa, baby barlo! Dee!”

There he stands, holding up my little patent flask as though he had made a wonderful discovery. To humor the child I took the little companion, said “Ta-ta,” and was in the act of slipping it back to my wife, when I decided to keep it. I am not partial to the cup that cheers and also inebriates, and yet I have an appreciation of the pocket pistol that warms, sustains and heartens in a long tramp on a zero afternoon with only a dog for companionship and the chances of bagging anything much reduced to a minimum. I stepped to the sideboard and filled the “barlo” *quantum suff*.

“Ah, Scrib! You're early on deck” was the grunting of the Doc. “None of the others are here yet. But I guess we'll not have long to wait. There is surely no laggard or lunkhead in our jolly sextette. On such an occasion as a Christmas Eve hunt, with an oyster supper at stake, the resources of our whole happy hunting grounds on trial, and the pluck and prowess of six rival sports in question there should certainly be no such word as 'funk!”'

Even as the Doc spoke Tinker dropped in. Hardly was he seated when Shy puffed his way into the little smoking room. We waited five minutes for the Judge, and had become impatient before Budge put in an appearance.

What an assortment of unique nomenclature! Gun-club designations they were, of course. In polite society “Scrib” was the village editor; “Tinker” was our general store keeper; “The Judge” was young Lawyer B———; “Budge” was mine host of the Queen's Arms, and the “Doc” was just the doctor—our large-hearted, clever, hard-working local M. D., the life and soul of the sport-loving community, as he was also the idol of the village and district for his skill, his unselfishness and his unvarying *bonhomie*.

“Budge!” exclaims the Doc. “As president of this club I fine you——”

“I rise to a point of order!” breaks in the Judge. “This meeting is not yet duly open, and, at all events, this is a special one, and business of the regular order must be excluded. Referring to the constitution——”

“Oh, to thunder with the constitution! Let us get off on our hunt!” And Tinker looks annihilation at the

order pointer.

“Well, well, fellows,” laughs the Doc, “I shall rule partially in favor of both. I shall rule that Budge do tell us his latest joke as a penalty. Come now, prisoner, out with it and save your fine!”

“Say, boys,” begins Budge, deprecatingly, “don't insist. I'm sorry I was late, but the fact is I was giving elaborate orders for the supper, which I know it will be just my luck to get stuck for. One of my special orders was to secure a magnificent roast and have it cooked in Ben Jonson style.”

“Ben Jonson style? How is that?” queries the Doc.

“'O, rare Ben Jonson!' There, Mr. President,” he adds, when the laugh ceases, “I believe that debt is squared.” We have made out our list and fixed points, ranging from chipmunk, 1, to bear, 1,000.

“You leave out quail, I notice. Now that is an omission which——”

But the Judge is cut short on all sides.

“Out in the wild and woolly West, from whence you have but recently emigrated to civilization and refinement,” remarks the Doc, “quail are about as plentiful as hedge sparrows are here. But a quail has not been seen in this section for ten years, I'll venture to say. No, Judge, we needn't point on quail this time!”

“And yet,” I observe in an encouraging tone, “who knows but we may each and all happen on a covey.”

“That is extravagant. But if any man should be lucky enough to bag a brace, that I may enjoy one more good square meal of quail on toast, I'll stand the supper.” And the Judge looked straight at Budge.

“Now that is what I would call extravagant—supper for a whole party in consideration of a dish of quail on toast. Suppose you yourself should bag the brace. But this reminds me of the man who ordered quail on toast in a Boston restaurant. He was brought in some toast. He waited a while. Presently he called the waiter and repeated the order. 'There you are, sir!' answered Thomas. 'That? That is toast, of course; but where's the quail?' The waiter pointed to a small speck in the centre of each slice, looking like a baked fly. 'Ah! so this dish is quail on toast, is it?' 'Yes, sir!' 'Then you just remove it and bring me turkey on toast!'”

We draw lots for choice of directions, and fix 8 p. m. sharp for reassembling to compare scores. My choice fell on a due north course, along which, seven miles distant, lay cover where I had scarcely ever failed to find at least fair sport and to take game, such as it was. And I went it alone—barring my dog.

“SEVEN MILES OF HARD FOOTING IT.”

Seven miles of hard footing it and I had only the brush of a couple of red squirrels, the wing of a chicken hawk, and the lean carcass of a small rabbit to show. I had sighted a fox far out of range, and had been taken unawares by a brace of birds which Charlie had nobly flushed and I had shockingly muffed.

The dog had followed the birds deeper into the wood, leaving me angry and uncertain what to do. Suddenly I heard his yelp of rage and disappointment give place to his business bark, and I knew my pup had a tree for me. It was a sound not to be mistaken. My dog never now plays spoof with me by tonguing a tree for hair. His business bark means partridge every time. I hurried on as the dog gave tongue more sharp and peremptory, taking a skirt to avoid a tangled piece of underbrush as I began-to approach the critical spot.

The ruins of an old shanty lay fifty yards to my left, and between them and me was a sort of *cache* or root cellar, the sides intact but the roof half gone.

All of a sudden there broke on my ear a sound I had not heard for many a day.

I listened, almost dumfounded. There it is again! And no mistaking it. It is the pipe of a quail!

It came from a patch of meadow not many rods off, and it set every nerve in my body a-tingling. Charlie and his partridges were out of mind instanter. I had no manner of use for them at that supreme moment.

“It's no stray bird!” I mentally ejaculated. “Perhaps it's a regular Kansas covey!” Heavens, what luck! The boys—the Judge—quail on toast—the laugh—the amazement—the consternation—I conjured all these things up in my excited brain in less time than it takes to tell it.

I started forward with every fibre a-tension. I was wild to get even a glimpse of the little strangers.

"WHIR-R-R-R! ROSE THE BIRDS."

Suddenly—enough almost to puzzle me—the pipe was answered from the mouth of the old potato pit, and the next instant "whir-r-r-r!" rose the birds, and "bang! bang!" I gave them right and left at a range and with a calculation that left three only to join and tell the tale to the whistler in the meadow. Seven was the drop, and the birds were as plump and pretty as ever I had set eyes on. I fairly chuckled aloud in glee at the surprise I had in store for my club mates. I sat down, took a congratulatory nip, and actually toyed with the quail as a boy would with the first fruits of his initial day's outing with his own boughten gun!

My faithful dog Charlie had during this time stuck to his birds. I could hear his angry bark growing angrier, and I could detect, as I fancied, a shade of impatience and disappointment therein. A crack at a partridge will be a change, I thought, and so I hurried in Charlie's direction.

There he sat on a rotten stump, with eyes fixed on the brushy top of a dead pine.

I looked that top over, limb by limb, but not a sign of a feather could I detect. I made a circuit, and skinned every twig aloft in a vain endeavor to discover a roosting bird. I began to think the pup was daft, but I dismissed the reflection promptly as ungenerous and unfair to my trusty cocker. I make solemn affidavit that, though I could not note the suggestion of a partridge up that pine, my spaniel could see it as plain as a pike staff.

"I'll climb the stump!" said I. *Mirabile dictu!* There, on lower limbs, one above the other and hugging the bark so close that they seemed part of it, were my missed brace!

"Bang!" and the topmost tumbles, nearly knocking his mate off as he falls.

"Bang!" and down comes No. 2.

Charlie manifests a sense of relieved anxiety and satisfaction that of itself rewards me for the perplexing search.

But a drowsiness had been creeping over me till its influence had become almost irresistible. I felt stupid and sleep-inclined.

Almost without knowing what I did I pulled out my flask, poured "just a nip" a fair portion in the cup and drank it off. The twilight was coming on and casting its sombre shadows, *avant coureurs* of the black winter night that was soon to envelop the scene for a brief while, till fair Luna lit up the heavens and chased Darkness to its gloomy lair.

I have an indistinct recollection of recalling lines I have read somewhere or other:

When Life's last sun is sinking slow and sad,
How cold and dark its lengthened shadows fall.
They lie extended on the straightened path
Whose narrow close, the grave, must end it all.

Oh, Life so grudging in your gifts, redeem
By one great boon the losses of the Past!
Grant me a full imperishable Faith,
And let the Light be with me till the last.

Then all became a blank!

"JUST A NIP."

"Full? I never knew him to more than taste liquor. No, no! You're mistaken. He has either been knocked senseless by some accident or mischance, or else he has fallen in a fit."

It was the Doc who spoke. I suddenly grew seized of consciousness to the extent of recognizing my old friend's voice. But to indicate the fact physically was impossible. I lay in a sort of trance, with lips that would not open and hands that would not obey.

"Oh, all right, Doc! You ought to know!"

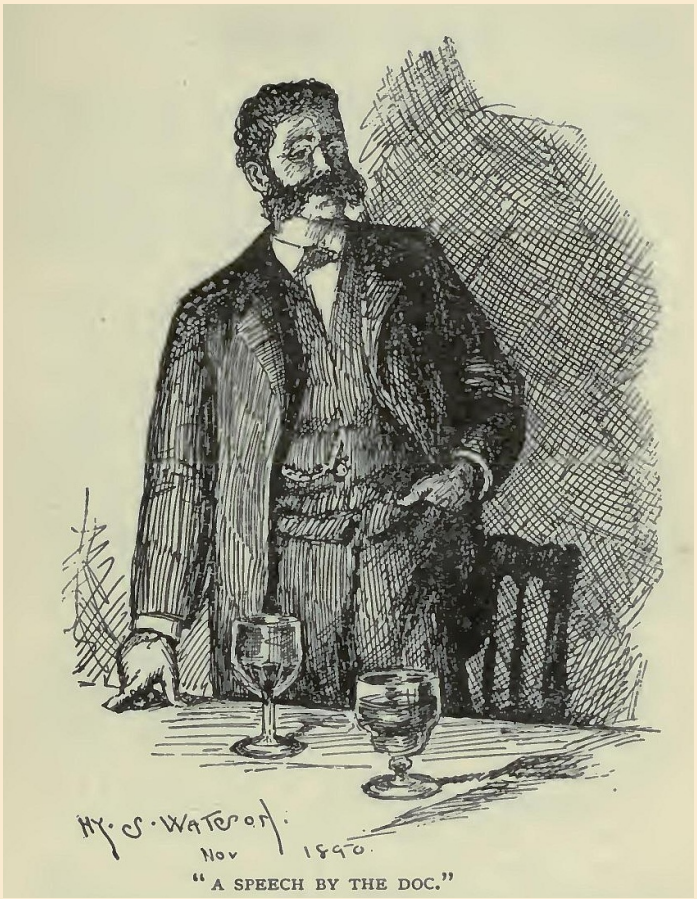
This time I caught the voice of the Judge.

"But he is in a pitiable plight. We must get to him and move him or he may perhaps perish, if he's not gone now. Drat that dog! I don't want to shoot him; and yet he'll tear us if we try to lay hand on his master. But lay hand on him we must. Is it a go, Doc?"

"It's the only alternative, Judge. I like canine fidelity; but hang me if this brute doesn't suit too well! We'll have to get him out of the way and succor the man. Give it to him, Judge!"

"Stop!"

By a superhuman effort, through some agency I never could account for, I managed to utter that one word in a sort of half expostulatory, half authoritative tone, or rather groan.



"A SPEECH BY THE DOC."

It broke the spell.

My eyes opened. My arms regained power. Instinctively I reached out a hand and drew my canine guardian toward me, placing a cheek against his cold, moist nose. That was enough for Charlie. The faithful brute grew wild with joy. He barked, whined, jumped, capered, pirouetted after his own stump, and, in a word, did the most tremendous despite to all my careful training in the line of reserved and dignified demeanor.

I rose to a sitting posture and finally drew myself up on my feet, gazing around me in a bewildered, uncertain sort of way.

“Hello, boys, what's the matter?” I managed to articulate.

“Hello, and what's the matter yourself?” replied the Doc.

“Yes, that's precisely what we came out here to know,” put in the Judge.

“I guess—I think—yes, let me see!—I believe I—I—must have dropped off in a little doze, boys! Very kind of you to look me up. Only—say, you never surely meant to shoot my dog? I'd have haunted both of you to your respective dying days if you had, supposing I was a cold corpse instead of a man taking a little nap.”

“Taking a little nap! Hear him! I should rather say you were. But, look here, Scrib, do your little naps always mean two or three hours of the soundest sleep a man ever slept who wasn't dead or drugged?”

“Dead or drugged, Doc? Pshaw, you're away off. You can see for yourself I am not dead, and I can vow I wasn't drugged.”

“Then you've been intoxicated, by George; and as president of the Blank-ville Gun Club I'll fine you——”

“Quail, as I live!”

“One—two—three; three brace and a half, Doc, and beauties, too! It does my heart good to handle the darlings. Doc, if Scrib has been full forty times to-day, he has more than atoned for the *lapsi* with this glorious bag. Whoop! Ya, ha! There'll be quail on toast for the whole party.”

By the time the Judge's jubilation had ceased I had about regained my normal condition and we were ready to make tracks homeward.

The clock strikes the midnight hour as I re-enter my own home. My wife sits rocking the cradle, in which lies our darling Ted. She turns a weary-looking, tear-stained face to me.

“Its all right, dear,” I gently remark, “I'm quite safe, as you see.”

“I haven't the slightest doubt of it, sir,” she returns, icily. “It's not of you I've been thinking, but of baby.”

“Baby,” I repeat inquiringly. “What is the matter with him?”

“There is nothing the matter with him, but there is no telling what might have been. And all owing to your foolish indulgence of his fancy for bottles.”

“What does it mean, dear?” I venture. “It means that you had not been gone an hour when I found Ted with that little two-ounce phial you left half filled with laudanum on the lower pantry shelf yesterday. He had evidently climbed a chair and reached it down. The cork was out and the bottle was empty. You can perhaps imagine my feelings. I didn't know whether he had taken the stuff or not, but was in an agony of anxiety on the point, you may be sure. The doctor was away hunting, you were away hunting, and here was I fairly consumed with apprehension lest my baby had poisoned himself.”

Like a flash the whole mystery of my stupor sleep revealed itself to me. “Baby barlo”—flask—laudanum phial—whiskey—it was all as clear as day.

I said: “But it transpires he hadn't taken any of the laudanum, eh?”

“Yes, thank Heaven! But for all of you——-”

“Listen, please. All I want to say is that what Ted missed I got. Do you understand?”

“Do *I* understand! Are *you* in your sane and sober senses, William?”

“I have a shrewd suspicion that I am,” I replied, with a slight laugh, “and being so, I will repeat it: Baby didn't down the poison; but I guess I made up for that, because *I did!*”

Then I told her the story.

Of course I gained my point. It ended with—— but, no matter. The Judge stood the supper in consideration of quail on toast being incorporated in the menu, and we sat around the festive board in the Queen's Arms a week later, and talked over our Xmas Eve hunting match. No one was disposed to question the sentiment in a speech by the Doc, who declared: “Fellows, our prowess as a gun club is growing, and I verily believe the old district is getting to be once more something like a half-decent hunting ground. Let us keep together, be as men and brothers always, and—I was nearly overlooking it—let us invariably wash out our pocket pistols before filling 'em up afresh.”

HERNE THE HUNTER, By William Perry Brown

Herne the Hunter was tall, brown and grizzled. The extreme roundness of his shoulders indicated strength rather than infirmity, while the severing of his great neck at a blow would have made a feudal executioner famous in his craft. An imaginative man might have divined something comely beneath the complex conjunction of lines and ridges that made up his features, but it would have been more

by suggestion, however, than by any actual resemblance to beauty traceable thereon. The imprint of strength, severity and endurance was intensified by an open contempt of appearance; only to a subtle second-sight was revealed aught nobler, sweeter and sadder, like faint stars twinkling behind filmy clouds.

Some town-bred Nimrod, with a misty Shakespearean memory, had added to his former patronymic of “Old Herne” that of Windsor's ghostly visitor. The mountaineers saw the fitness of the title, and “Herne the Hunter” became widely current.

His place of abode was as ambiguous as his history, being somewhere beyond the “Dismal,” amid the upper caves and gorges of the Nantahalah. The Dismal was a weird, wild region of brake and laurel, walled in by lonely mountains, with a gruesome outlet between two great cliffs, that nearly met in mid-air hundreds of feet over a sepulchral Canyon, boulder-strewn, and thrashed by a sullen torrent, that led from a dolorous labyrinth, gloomy at midday, and at night resonant with fierce voices and sad sighings.

Far down in Whippoorwill Cove, the mountaineers told savage tales of adventure about the outskirts of the Dismal, yet, beyond trapping round the edges or driving for deer, it was to a great extent a *terra incognita* to all, unless Herne the Hunter was excepted.

“The devil air in the man, 'nd hopes him out'n places no hones' soul keers to pester hisse'f long of.”

This was common opinion, though a few averred that “Old Herne 'nd the devil wern't so master thick atter all.” Said one: “Why, the dinged old fool totes his Bible eroun' ez riglar ez he do his huntin'-shirt. Onct when the parson wuz holdin' the big August meetin' down ter Ebeneezer Meetin'-house, he stepped in. The meetin' was a gittin' ez cold ez hen's feet, 'nd everybody a lookin' at Herne the Hunter, when down he draps onto his knees, 'nd holdin' on by his rifle he 'gun ter pray like a house afire. Wal, he prayed 'nd he prayed, 'twel the people, arter thur skeer wuz over, 'gun ter pray 'nd shout too, 'nd fust they all knowed, the front bench wuz plum full of mou'ners. Wal, they hed a hog-killin' time fur a while, 'nd all sot on by Herne the Hunter, but when they quieted down 'nd begun ter luk fer him—by jing!—he wern't thar. Nobody hed seed him get erway, 'nd that set 'em ter thinkin', 'nd the yupshot wuz they hed the bes' meetin' old Ebeneezer hed seed in many a year.”

Once a belated hunter discovered, when the fog came down, that he was lost amid the upper gorges of the Nantahalahs. While searching for some cranny wherein to pass the night, he heard a voice seemingly in mid-air before him, far out over an abyss of seething vapor which he feared concealed a portion of the dreaded Dismal. Memories of Herne the Hunter crowded upon him, and he strove to retrace his steps, but fell into a trail that led him to a cave which seemed to bar his further way. The voice came nearer; his blood chilled as he distinguished imprecations, prayers and entreaties chaotically mingled, and all the while approaching him. He fled into the cave, and peering thence, beheld a shadowy form loom through the mist, gesticulating as it came.

A whiff blew aside shreds of the fog, and he saw Herne the Hunter on the verge of a dizzy cliff, shaking his long rifle, his hair disheveled, his eyes dry and fiery, and his huge frame convulsed by the emotions that dominated him. The very fury and pathos of his passion were terrifying, and the watcher shrank back as old Herne, suddenly dropping his rifle, clutched at the empty air, then paused dejectedly.

“Always thus!” he said, in a tone of deep melancholy. “Divine in form—transfigured—beautiful—oh, so beautiful!—yet ever with the same accursed face. I have prayed over these visitations. I, have sought in God's word that confirmation of my hope which should yet save me from despair; but, when rising from my supplications, the blest vision confronts me—the curse is ever there—thwarting its loveliness—reminding me of what was, but will never be again.”

He drew a tattered Bible from his bosom and searched it intently. He was a sight at once forbidding and piteous, as he stood with wind-fluttered garments, his foot upon the edge of a frightful precipice, his head bent over the book as though devouring with his eyes some sacred antidote against the potency of his sorrow. Then he looked up, and the Bible fell from his hands. His eyes became fixed; he again clutched at the air, then fell back with a despairing gesture, averting his face the while.

“Out of my sight!” he cried. “Your eyes are lightning, and your smile is death. I will have no more of you—no more! And yet—O God! O God!—what dare I—what can I do without you?”

He staggered back and made directly for the cavern. The watcher shrank back, while Herne the Hunter brushed blindly by, leaving Bible and rifle on the rock without. Then the wanderer, slipping out, fled down the narrow trail as though there were less peril from the dizzy cliffs around than in the society of the strange man whose fancies peopled these solitudes with such soul-harrowing phantoms.

Thus for years Herne the Hunter had been a mystery, a fear, and a fascination to the mountaineers; recoiling from men, abhorring women, rebuffing curiosity, yet' at times strangely tender, sad, and ever morbidly religious. He clung to his Bible as his last earthly refuge from his darker self, and to the aspirations it engendered as a bane to the fatalistic stirrings within him.

He was a mighty hunter and lived upon the proceeds of his skill. Once or twice a year he would appear at some mountain store, fling down a package of skins, and demand its worth in powder and lead. The jean-clad loungers would regard him askance, few venturing to idly speak with him, and none repeating the experiment. His mien daunted the boldest. If women were there he would stand aloof until they left; on meeting them in the road he would sternly avert his eyes as though from a distasteful presence. One day the wife of a storekeeper, waiting on him in her husband's absence, ventured to say, while wrapping up his purchases:

“I've all'ays wonnered, Mr. Herne, what makes ye wanter git outen the wimmen folks' way? Mos' men likes ter have 'em eroun'.”

Herne the Hunter frowned heavily, but made no reply.

“I'm shore, if ye had a good wife long with ye way up thar whur ye live, she'd make ye a leetle more like a man 'nd less like a—a—” she hesitated over a term which might censure yet not give offense.

“Like a beast you would say.” He exclaimed then with vehemence: “Were the necks of all women in one, and had I my hands on it, I'd strangle them all, though hell were their portion thereafter.”

He made a gesture as of throttling a giant, snatched his bundle from the woman's hand and took himself off up the road with long strides.

That night was a stormy one. Herne the Hunter was covering the last ten miles between him and the Dismal in a pelting rain. The incident at the store, trivial as it was, had set his blood aflame. He prayed and fought against himself, oblivious of the elements and the darkness, sheltering his powder beneath his shirt of skins where his Bible lay secure. In his ears was the roar of wind and the groans of the tortured forest. Dark ravines yawned beside him, out of which the wolf howled and the mountain owl laughed; and once came a scream like a child, yet stronger and more prolonged. He knew the panther's voice, yet he heeded nothing.

At last another cry, unmistakably human, rose nearer by. Then he paused, like a hound over a fresher scent, until it was repeated. He made his way around a shoulder of the mountain, and aided by the gray light of a cloud-hidden moon, approached the figures of a woman, a boy and a horse, all three dripping and motionless.

“Thank God! we will not die here, after all,” exclaimed the female, as Herne the Hunter grimly regarded them. “Oh, sir, we have missed the way. This boy was guiding me to the survey camp of Captain Renfro, my husband, on the upper Swananoa. He has sprained his foot, and we have been lost for hours. Can you take us to a place of shelter? I will pay you well—”

“I hear a voice from the pit,” said Herne, fiercely. “It is the way with your sex. You think, though you sink the world, that with money you can scale Heaven. Stay here—rot—starve—perish—what care I!”

After this amazing outburst he turned away, but her terror of the night overbore her fear of this strange repulse, and she grasped his arm. He shook himself free, though the thrill accompanying her clasp staggered him. For years no woman's hand had touched him; but at this rebuff she sank down, crying brokenly:

“What shall I do? I should not have started. They warned me below, but I thought the boy knew the way. Oh, sir! if you have a heart, do not leave us here.”

“A heart!” he cried. “What's that? A piece of flesh that breeds endless woes in bosoms such as yours. All men's should be of stone—as mine is now!” He paused, then said abruptly: “Up with you and follow me. I neither pity nor sympathize; but for the sake of her who bore me, I will give you such shelter as I have.”

He picked up the boy, who, knowing him, had sat stupefied with fear, and bade the woman follow him.

“But the horse?” she said, hesitating.

“Leave it,” he replied. “The brute is the best among you, but whither we go no horse may follow.”

He turned, taking up the boy in his arms, and she dumbly followed him, trembling, faint, yet nerved by her fears to unusual exertion. So rapid was his gait, encumbered though he was, that she kept him in view with difficulty. Through the gloom she could divine the perils that environed their ever upward way. The grinding of stricken trees, the brawl of swollen waters harrowed her nerves not less than the partial gleams of unmeasured heights and depths revealed by the lightning. A sense of helplessness exaggerated these terrors among the unknown possibilities surrounding her.

It seemed as though they would never stop again. Her limbs trembled, her heart thumped suffocatingly, yet their guide gave no heed, but pressed on as though no shivering woman pantingly dogged his steps. They traveled thus for several miles. She felt herself giving way totally when, on looking up once more, she saw that the hunter had vanished.

“Where am I?” she cried, and a voice, issuing seemingly out of the mountain-side, bade her come on. Her hands struck a wall of rock; on her right a precipice yawned; so, groping toward the left, she felt as she advanced that she was leaving the outer air; the wind and rain no longer beat upon her, yet the darkness was intense.

She heard the voice of the boy calling upon her to keep near. Into the bowels of the mountains she felt her way until a gleam of light shone ahead. She hastened forward round a shoulder of rock into a roomy aperture branching from the main cavern. The boy lay upon a pallet of skins, while Herne the Hunter fixed the flaring pine-knot he had lighted into a crevice of the rock. Then he started a fire, drew out of another crevice some cold cooked meat and filled a gourd with water from a spring that trickled out at one end of the cave.

“Eat,” he said, waving his hand. “Eat—that ye may not die. The more unfit to live, the less prepared for death. Eat!”

With that he turned away and busied himself in bathing and bandaging the boy's foot, which, though not severely sprained, was for the time quite painful. Mrs. Renfro now threw back the hood of her waterproof and laid the cloak aside. Even old Herne—women hater that he was—could not have found fault with the matronly beauty of her face, unless with its expression of self-satisfied worldliness, as of one who judged others and herself solely by conventional standards, shaped largely by flattery and conceit.

She was hungry—her fears were somewhat allayed, and though rather disgusted at such coarse diet, ate and drank with some relish. Meanwhile, Herne the Hunter turned from the boy for something, and beheld her face for the first time. A water-gourd fell from his hands, his eyes dilated, and he crouched as he gazed like a panther before its unsuspecting prey. Every fibre of his frame quivered, and drops of cold sweat stood out upon his forehead. The boy saw with renewed fear this new phase of old Herne's dreaded idiosyncrasies. Mrs. Renfro at length raised her eyes and beheld him thus. Instantly he placed his hands before his face, and abruptly left the cavern. Alarmed at his appearance, she ran toward the boy, exclaiming:

“What *can* be the matter with him? Do you know him?”

“I knows more of him 'n I wants ter,” replied the lad. “Oh, marm, that's old Herne, 'nd we uns air the fust ones ez hev be'n in hyar whar he stays. I ganny! I thort shore he'd hev yeaten ye up.”

“Well, but who is he?”

“Well, they do say ez the devil yowns him, not but what he air powerful 'ligyus. No one knows much 'bouten him, 'cep'n' he's all'ays a projeckin' eround the Dismal whar no one yelse wants ter be.”

“Has he been here long?”

“Yurs 'nd yurs, they say.” Tommy shook his head as though unable to measure the years during which Herne the Hunter had been acquiring his present unsavory reputation, but solved the riddle by exclaiming: “I reckon he hev all'ays be'n that-a-way.”

An hour or more passed. Tommy fell asleep, while the lady sat musing by his side. She did not feel like sleeping, though much fatigued. Finally she heard a deep sigh behind her, and turning saw the object of her fears regarding her sombrely. The sight of her face appeared to shock him, for he turned half away as he said:

“You have eaten the food that is the curse of life, in that it sustains it. Yet such we are. Sleep, therefore, for you have weary miles to go, ere you can reach the Swananoa.”

There was an indescribable sadness in his tone that touched her, and she regarded him curiously.

“Who are you,” she asked, “and why do you choose to live in such a place as this?”

“Ask naught of me,” he said, with an energy he seemed unable to repress. “Ask rather of yourself who am I and how came I—thus.”

He struck himself upon the breast, and without awaiting an answer again abruptly left the cave. She sat there wondering, trying to-weave into definite shape certain vague impressions suggested by his presence, until weariness overcame her and she slept.

Hours after, Herne the Hunter reentered the cave, bearing a torch. His garments were wet, the rain-drops clung to his hair, and his face was more haggard than ever. He advanced towards the slumbering woman softly, and stood over her, gazing mournfully upon her, while large tears rolled down his cheeks. Then his expression changed to one that was stern and vindictive. His hand nervously toyed with the knife in his belt. Milder thoughts again seemed to sway him, and his features worked twitchingly.

“I cannot, I cannot,” he whispered to himself. “The tears I thought forever banished from these eyes return at this sight. There has never been another who could so move me. Though thou hast been my curse, and art yet my hell—I cannot do it. Come! protector of my soul; stand thou between me and all murderous thoughts!”

He drew his Bible from his bosom, kissed it convulsively, then held it as though to guard her from himself, and drawing backward slowly, he again fled into the storm and darkness without.

The gray light of morning rose over the Dismal, though within the cave the gloom still reigned supreme, when Herne the Hunter again stood at the entrance holding a flaring light. Then he said aloud: “Wake, you that sleep under the shadow of death! Wake, eat, and—pass on!” Mrs. Renfro aroused herself. The boy, however, slept on. Herne fixed his torch in the wall, and replenished the fire. Then he withdrew, apparently to give the lady privacy in making her toilet.

She was stiff in limb and depressed in mind. After washing at the spring, she wandered listlessly about the cave, surveying old Herne's scanty store of comforts. Suddenly she paused before a faded picture, framed in long, withered moss, that clung to an abutment of the rock. It was that of a girl, fair, slender and ethereal. There was a wealth of hair, large eyes, and features so faultless that the witching sense of self-satisfaction permeating them, added to rather than marred their loveliness.

The lady—glancing indifferently—suddenly felt a thrill and a pain. A deadly sense of recognition nearly overcame her, as this memento—confronting her like a resurrected chapter of the past—made clear the hitherto inexplicable behavior of their host. She recovered, and looked upon it tenderly, then shook her head gently and sighed.

“You cannot recognize it!” said a deep voice behind her. “You dare not! For the sake of your conscience—your hope in heaven—your fear of hell—you dare not recognize and look upon me!”

She did not look round, though she knew that Herne the Hunter stood frowning behind, but trembled in silence as he went on with increasing energy:

“What does that face remind you of? See you aught beneath that beauty but treachery without pity, duplicity without shame? Lo! the pity and the shame you should have felt have recoiled upon me—me, who alone have suffered.” He broke off abruptly, as though choked by emotion. She dared not face him; she felt incapable of a reply. After a pause, he resumed, passionately: “Oh! Alice, Alice! The dead rest, yet the living dead can only endure. Amid these crags, and throughout the solitude of years, I have fought and refought the same old battle; but with each victory it returns upon me, strengthened by defeat, while with me all grows weaker but the remorselessness of memory and the capacity for pain.”

She still stood, with bowed head, shivering as though his words were blows.

“Have you nothing to say?” he asked. “Does that picture of your own youth recall no vanished tenderness for one who—self-outcast of men—fell to that pass through you?”

“I have a husband,” she murmured, almost in a whisper.

“Aye, and because of that husband I have no wife—no wife—no wife!” His wailing repetition seemed absolutely heartbroken; but sternly he continued: “You have told me where he is. I say to you—hide him—hide him from me! Even this”—he struck his bosom with his Bible feverishly—“may not save him. I have prayed and wrought, but it is as nothing—nothing—when I think—when I remember. Therefore, hide him from me—lest I slay him—”

“You would not—you dare not harm him!” She faced him now, a splendid picture of an aroused wife and mother. “He is not to blame—he knew you not—he has been good to me—and—and—I love him.”

He shrank from the last words as though from a blow, and stood cowering. Then he hissed out:

“Let me not find him. Hide him—hide him!”

Tommy here awoke with a yawn, and announced that his foot was about well. Herne, closing his lips, busied himself about preparing breakfast, which cheerless meal was eaten in silence. When they finally emerged from the cave the sun was peeping into the Dismal below them; bright gleams chased the dark shadows down the cliffs, and the morning mists were melting. The storm was over; there was a twitter of birds, the tinkle of an overflowing burn, and a squirrel's bark emphasizing the freshness of the morn. The pure air entered the lips like wine, and Mrs. Renfro felt her depression roll off as they retraced the devious trail of the night before.

They found the lady's horse standing dejectedly near where he had been left. The fog, in vast rolls, was climbing out of the Dismal, disclosing dark masses of forest below. The flavor of pine and balsam slept beneath the trees, every grass blade was diamond-strewn, and every sound vivified by the sense of mighty walls and unsounded depths.

After Mrs. Renfro had mounted, Herne the Hunter swept an arm around. The scene was savage and sombre, despite the sunlight. The intensity of the solitude about them dragged upon the mind like a weight.

“Behold,” he said sadly, “this is my world. I can tolerate no other.”

She inwardly shuddered; then a wave of old associations swept over her mind. Beneath the austerity of the man, beyond his selfish nurture of affliction, she—for the moment—remembered him as he once was, homely, kindly, enthusiastic and true. Had *she* indeed changed him to this? Or was it not rather the imperativeness of a passion, unable to endure or forget her preference of another? Whatever the cause, her heart now ached for him, though she feared him.

“Come with us,” she said. “You were not made to live thus.”

“I cannot—I dare not. It will take months to undo the misery of this meeting.”

“My husband—”

“Do not name him!” he cried fiercely; then abruptly lowering his tone, he said, with infinite sadness: “Ask me no more. Yonder, by that white cliff, lies the Swan-anoa trail you missed yesterday. The kindest thing you can do is to forget that you have seen me. Farewell!”

He turned away and swung himself down the mountain-side into the Dismal. She saw the rolling mists close over him, and remained motionless in a reverie so deep that the boy spoke twice to her before she turned her horse's head and followed him.

Above the surveyor's camp lay the Swananoa Gap, a gloomy, precipitous gorge through which the river lashed itself into milder reaches below. Mrs. Renfro found her husband absent. With a single assistant he had started for the upper defiles, intending to be gone several days. They told her that he would endeavor to secure the services of Herne the Hunter as a guide, as one knowing more of that wilderness than any one else.

Here was fresh food for wifely alarm. Herne had never met her husband, yet the latter's name would make known his relationship to herself. She shuddered over the possibilities that might result from their sojourn together—far from aid—in those wild mountains, and made herself wretched for a week in consequence.

Meanwhile the transient fine weather passed; the rains once more descended, and the peaks of Nantahalah were invisible for days amid a whirl of vapor. The boom of the river, the grinding of forest limbs, the shriek of the wind, made life unusually dreary at the camp. She lay awake one night when the elements were apparently doing their worst. Her husband was still absent—perhaps alone with a possible maniac, raving over the memory of fancied wrongs.

Finally another sound mingled with and at last overmastered all others—something between a crash and a roar, interblended with sullen jars and grindings. Near and nearer it came. She sprang to the tent-floor and found her feet in the water. The darkness was intense. What could be the matter? Fear overcame her resolution and she shrieked aloud.

A man bearing a lantern burst into the tent with a hoarse cry. Its gleams showed her Herne the Hunter, drenched, draggled, a ghastly cut across his face, with the blood streaming down, his long hair flying, and in his eyes a fierce flame.

“I feared I would not find you,” he shouted, for the roar without was now appalling. “It is a cloud-burst above. In five minutes this hollow will be fathoms deep. The tents lower down are already gone. Come!”

He had seized and was bearing her out.

“Save—alarm the others!” she cried.

“You first—Alice.”

In that dread moment she detected the hopelessness with which he called her thus, as though such recognition was wrung from his lips by the pain he hugged, even while it rended him.

“My husband?” she gasped, growing faint over the thought of his possible peril—or death.

“Safe,” he hissed through his clenched teeth, for his exertions were tremendous. With a fierce flap the tent was swept away as they left it. About his knees the waters swirled, while limbs and other floating débris swept furiously by.

What seemed to her minutes—though really seconds—passed amid a terrific jumble of sounds, while the rain fell in sheets. It seemed as though the invisible mountains were dissolving. They were, however, slowly rising above the floods. She heard Herne's hard breathing, and felt his wild heart-throbs as he held her close.

Something heavy struck them, or rather him, for he shielded her. One of his arms fell limp, and he groaned heavily. Then she swooned away, with a fleeting sensation of being grasped by some one else.

Later, when she revived, there was a great hush in the air. Below, the river gently brawled-; there was a misty darkness around, and the gleam of a lantern held before a dear and familiar form.

“Husband—is it you?” she murmured.

“Yes, yes,” said Captain Renfro, “I thought I had lost you. You owe your life to Herne the Hunter. In fact, but for him I would have been overwhelmed myself.”

“Where is he?” she asked feebly.

“The men are searching for him. Just as one of them got hold of you, he fell back—something must have struck him, and the flood swept him off. I tell you, Alice, that man—crazy or not—is a hero. We were on our way down and had camped above the Gap, when the cloud-burst came. We knew you all would be overwhelmed before we could get round here by the trail; so what does Herne do but send us on horseback by land, while he scoots down that Canyon in a canoe—little better than an eggshell. Risked his life in that awful place to get here in time. I insisted on going with him at first.”

“Just like you, George,” said the wife fondly, though in her mind's eye came a vision of Herne the Hunter battling with that Niagara to save and unite the two, through whom his own life had been made a burden. She sighed and clasped her husband's hand, while he resumed:

“I was a fool, I expect, for the canoe would have swamped under both of us. He knew this, and ordered me off with a look I did not like; there was madness in it. Well, we hurried round by the trail with, one lantern; Herne took the other. When we got here, you were apparently dead, Herne and two of the men swept off—the camp gone from below, and so on.”

A cry was now heard. Several men hastened down, and soon lights were seen returning. Four of them bore Herne the Hunter. One arm and a leg were broken, and his skull crushed in; yet the wonderful vitality of the man had kept him alive and sensible.

“We found him clinging to a sapling,” said one. “But he's about gone—poor fellow!”

Poor fellow, indeed! Mrs. Renfro felt the lumps rise in her throat as she gazed upon that wreck, and thought. Presently Herne opened his eyes—already filling with the death-mist—and his gaze fell upon her face.

“Alice,” he whispered, “my troubles—are over. This”—he tugged at something in his bosom with his uninjured arm, when some one drew forth his Bible, drenched and torn—“this saved me. I could have killed him—” he glanced at Renfro, who amid his pity now wondered. “I could—but—I saved you. And—now—Jesus—have mercy—”

These were his last words, for in another minute Herne the Hunter was a thing of the past, and a weeping woman bent over him. After that there was silence for a while. Then the wife said to her husband, while the others removed the dead man:

“It was his misfortune, not my fault, that he loved me. Has he not made amends?”

And the husband, with his hands clasped in hers, could find no other heart than to say:

“Aye—most nobly!”

UNCLE DUKE'S “B'AR” STORY, By Lillian Gilfillan

I'LOWED ez mebbe you uns ud like ter hear thet thar b'ar story. I reckon it's ten year this December since it all happened. I war a-livin' up in thet house on th' edge uv th' corn fiel' 'long side th' branch, an' ef it 't'warn't fer thet b'ar I'd be a-livin' thar yet, 'stead uv a-settin' in th' warm corner uv Jim Ladd's fireplace.

I 'low ez yer knowed Jim didn't hev no great sight uv worldly efects when he married Becky Crabtree; I don't reckon his daddy war able ter do much fer him, 'ceptin' 'lowin' him the use uv thet yoke uv ole steers uv his'n.

Thet war afore they moved th' mill out'n th' holler yander, so it war right handy fer Jim ter haul his logs ter, an' he jes' worked hisse'f plumb nigh ter death a-gettin' up thet leetle log house uv his'n, an' a-plantin' fruit trees an' sech, an' all summer Becky worked jes' ez hard a-berry pickin', tendin' her truck patch an' a-peddlin' up ter th' station.

An' in th' winter time when Jim war a-makin' dish shelves an' a-puttin' some new splits inter th' bottoms uv them ole chiers his daddy give him, Becky war a-peecin' quilts an' a-spinnin' cloth fer dresses. Waal, in th' spring they war married an' went ter live in ther house on th' side uv th' mounting, out'n no neighbors, 'ceptin' me, fer a mile or more down th' cove.

Thet war th' spring I war tuck so bad with this misery in my back an' afore summer I war so cript up I warn't no 'count whatever.

One mornin' jes' ez I war a gettin' up from afore the fire whar I hed been a-eatin' a snack uv breakfast, Becky walked in, lookin' ez fresh ez a fiel' uv early corn, and sez:

“Uncle Duke, I 'lowed I'd come in an' see how you war an' rid up a leetle fur yer.”

I h'ant never been used ter wimen folks, an' I could'nt git th' consent uv my mind ter set by an' see every

thin' pot out'n its nat'ral place, so I reched my stick an' out'n sayin' nothin' I riz up an' went out under th' big gum tree.

It warn't long afore Becky kem out with her bucket on her arm, an' sez:

“Good-bye, Uncle Duke. I reckon I'll be a-gittin' along ter th' berry patch yan-der.”

I sed, “Thank yer, Becky. Don't yer come no more ter tend ter me. I 'low you's got a plenty ter do 'out'n a-doin' thet.”

Yer see, I didn't want ter be pestered with her fixin', yit she was so obleegin' ter everybody I didn't want ter 'fend her by axin' her ter stay ter hum. Waal, when I went in an' seed how piert things looked, I jes' wished I'd a-kep' my pipe in my mouth 'stead uv a-jawin' her. Spite uv my sayin' time an' ag'in fer her ter rest when her own work war done, she kep' a-comin'. I 'lowed she seed how much I enjoyed havin' things liken white folks lived in the house.

I 'low she war jes' ez bright an' happy thet year ez enny woman in the cove ez hed a plenty.

An' summer an' winter she 'peared ter be always a-workin'.

Waal in th' middle uv March leetle Jim kem, and I reckon thar warn't no two happier people in th' world. They war proud uv thet baby, an' no mistake.

The fust time I seed Becky arter it war born, she pulled a leetle hand out'n from under th' kiver an' sez:

“Uncle Duke, some day thet leetle han'll chop wood fur his mammy.”

Waal, it did'nt look much like handlin' an axe thin.

Thet summer she use ter roll th' baby up in her daddie's ole army blanket an' take it with her berry pickin' an' peddlin' an' everywhars; it 'peared like she didn't think its weight nothin', un' she'd go 'long th' road talkin' ter it like ez ef a baby four months ole knowed ennythin'. With th' money from her berries she bought th' winter clothes—mostely things fur th' baby an' flannel shirts fur her man—'peared like she thought th' cold wouldn't tech her.

It war th' last uv th' next June thet th' twins war born. This time Becky didn't seem ter git 'long so piert—jes' lay still an' pale like, an' a lookin' at the baby gals sad an' pityin'. I reckon she war a wonderin' whar th' warm winter clothes they'd need by' an' by' war ter be got from. It warn't in reason ter 'spose a woman could tote two babies an' do much at pickin' berries.

Jim worked ez hard ez enny man could, but his ole mare died jist at fodder pickin' time, an' he couldn't do much out'n a critter, so a right smart uv his crap war lost. Becky didn't seem ter get strong ez she did afore, an' her sister up an' left her sooner 'en she oughter. She seemed tar be kinder mad all th' time ter think Becky had gone an' hed twins, an' she didn't keep her 'pinions hid. I reckon Becky warn't sorry when she went back ter her man.

Ez I war a-sayin', it war ten year ago this December, an' a right smart uv snow on th' ground, when Becky came by my house one mornin' ter ax me ef I'd go down an' watch th' fire an' leetle Jim fer a spell. I seed she war lookin' anxious like, an' I axed her what war th' matter. “Jim went a-rabbit huntin' yesterday evenin',” she sed, “an' he ain't kem hum yit; I reckon somethin' hes happened ter him, an' I 'lowed I'd go an' see. The babies ez both asleep an' I speck ter be home afore long.”

She went on up th' mounting path a-makin' fur the top, a-holpin' herse'f over the sleek places with that hickory stick uv her'n.

I went on down ter th' house an' found leetle Jim a-noddin' afore th' fire. It war about'n th' time he always tuck his nap. Pretty soon he war ez sound asleep ez ef he war on th' biggest feather bed in th' cove, 'stead uv jes' his mammy's cook apron under his little yaller head.

I pot on a fresh log an' was mighty nigh asleep myse'f when one o' th' babies waked up an' cried a leetle.

Somehow I got th' cradle in an awk'ard place acrost a plank ez war all warped up an' th' churnin' back an' fore waked up th' t'other 'un. She jes' lay thar a-look-in' fust at me an' then at her leetle sister, kinder onsartin whether ter cry or not.

By an' by I thought I'd holp her back ter sleep, so I tuck her leetle han' an' tried ter pot her thumb in ter her mouth, but thar warn't nobody knowed enny better thin thet thar baby thet she didn't want no thumb feedin'. I got up an' went fur some milk, fust a-lookin' out'n th' door ter see ef Becky war a-comin'.

Seein' ez thar warn't no sign uv her no-whar, I 'lowed I try ter feed th' young uns, beein's th' both uv them war a-doin' ther best at cryin'.

They didn't seem ter take much ter my feedin'; I reckon thet war 'cause I didn't set th' milk afore th' fire fust, an' somehow it 'peared like' th' milk most in general went down th' outside uv ther necks; an' Annie (that war th' little un) kept a chokin' tell I had ter take her up. Jes' ez soon ez thet leetle critter got whar she could look 'round an' sense things, she 'peared quite satisfied.

I managed ter git t'other un (Fannie) out'n the cradle. They jumped an' twisted tell I thought I'd die uv the misery in my back, but whin I pot them down they yelled like hallelujer!

'Peard like they'd kept me a-dancin' a powerful long time, whin I heerd voices an' I 'lowed Becky war come, but it turned out ter be Mitch Pendergrass an' Sonk Levan, with some rabbits an' ther guns. They hed stopped by ter git warm.

Whin they seed me a-settin' thar nussin' two babies ter onct they bust out larfin'. Fannie hed holt uv my left year an' the leetle hair I hed on my head. Annie war a-sittin' on my knee a gazin' at Sonk an' Mitch, a-wonderin' why they war a-larfin'.

“I 'low, Uncle Duke,” sez Sonk, “ez yer've tuck ter lamin' nussin' late in life. It shows yer pluck ter commence on two ter onct. Whar's Becky?”

“She air gone ter look fer Jim,” sez I. “He went out a-huntin' last night an' he ain't never come hum this mornin'. She war oneasy 'bout him an' went out ter look fur him. 'Lowed ez she'd be hum afore this.”

Mitch went ter the door an' looked out an' thin cornin' back ter th' fire, sez he:

“It's arter twelve o'clock, nigh ez I kin calkerlate. Thar seems ter be a big black cloud a-hangin' over th'

Top.

“Becky ought'en ter be out in no sich. I reckon we'd better be a-movin'. Mebbe Jim's happened ter an acci*tent* an' she's a-tryin' ter holp him by herse'f.

“She's plucky, *she* is.”

“Waal,” sez Sonk, “Mitch, you give Uncle Duke a lesson in baby feedin' (the father uv ten ought'n ter know somethin' bout'n thet business); I'll tote in enough wood ter burn a spell, an' thin we'll light out'n hyar an' hunt up Becky an' Jim.” Arter Mitch's learnin' me ter hold th' spoon un' ter warm th' milk an' ter pot in sweetenin' me an' th' babies got on fine. Soon I hed them both sleepin', kivered up ter th' years, an' th' cradle sot in a warm place. Then I began ter feel powerful hungry, an' leetle Jim, though he ain't sed nothin', hed been a-watchin' thet thar spoon an' milk cup while I fed th' babies, an' a openin' his mouth long side uf them.

I skun one uv Sonk's rabbits, an' it warn't no time tel th' corn bread war a-cookin' in th' bake pan an' th' rabbit a-jumpin' up in th' grease.

Arter dinner Jim set on my knee jes' ez quiet, never axin' fer his mammy onct, an' thim babies slept on jes' like they knowed they war twins an' ther mammy gone. Pretty soon it began ter get dark an' th' snow war a-fallin' ag'in a leetle. Jim went ter sleep an' I pot him ter bed. The time 'peared ter go powerful slow arter that, an' I began ter nod.

It must have been eight o'clock whin voices in th' yard waked me. I opened th' door an' Mitch called out:

“Stir up the fire an' give us a leetle more light. Thar ain't no bones broke, but Jim don't feel egsactly piert.”

They brung him in an' his face war jes' ez pale an' he looked powerful weak.

Most of his coat war tore of'en him an' th' blood war a-droppin' from a place in his arm. Becky looked plumb wore out, but th' fust thin' she did soon ez Jim war on th' bed war ter lean over th' cradle an' sez:

“Uncle Duke, war my babies good?”

“Jes' ez good ez two leetle angels,” I sed, spitin' th' fact th' side uv my head war pretty sore from ther pullin' an' scratchin'.

She helped ter git Jim's arm wrapped up an' him warm in bed, an' thin began ter get supper, like nothin' hed happened out'n th' common. Whin I seed how pale she looked, I sed:

“Jus' yer git out th' plates an' I'll tend the fire. I 'low arter cookin' fer nigh thirty year, I kin git a snack yer can eat.”

It twarn't long until another rabbit war in th' pan an' th' coffee a-boilin'. Jim looked up whin he smelt the cookin' an' sez:

“I reckon we'll hev a little bigger meat fer to-morrow.”

I war jes' ez curious ez enny ole woman, but everybody was so tired an' hungry I didn't ax anny questions.

Becky war a-sittin' in a low chier afore th' fire with leetle Jim on her lap a-warm-in' his leetle feet in her han'. I could see th' tears war a-chasin' each other down her face.

Mon! but they did eat. Jim, too, and I had' ter git th' cold meat left from dinner ter hev enough.

When they hed got up from th' table Sonk sed:

“Mitch, your wife'll need you with all thim chil'n; I 'low you'd better be a-goin'. I reckon I'll stop hyer; step by an' tell Sallie ter hev breakfast early, an' tell leetle Lular pappy'll be home in th' mornin'. You hev th' mules ready early; I am afeard uv th' varmints a-gittin' Becky's game.”

Arter Mitch war gone an' things picked up they told me ther story.

'Pears like thar warn't no trouble in a trackin' Becky up ter th' top, an' they found her a-tryin' ter work Jim out'n a hole in th' bluff.

Th' night afore, jes' ez Jim war a-makin' fur hum with his game, he hed run agin' a big b'ar. He up an' fired, but missed, it bein' most dark. The b'ar war on him afore he could load agin, an' makin' a pass at him with its big paw, knocked th' musket out'n his han's an' bruck it plumb in two. Jim hed jes' time ter make up a saplin' an' Mr. B'ar set down under him ter bide his time.

He sot thar a long spell, an' it war most midnight, nigh ez Jim could tell, whin the b'ar made off an' lay down, seein' Jim warn't willin' ter come down an' be et. Waal, Jim decided thin he would come down an' run fur it, 'lowin' a hot chase war better'n freezin' up thar. So down he dumb an' lit out, Mr. B'ar arter him. Jes' ez they struck the bluff path the b'ar got so near thet it riz up an' grabbed him. Jim bein' quick got away, leavin' Mr. B'ar most uv his coat ter 'member him by, but in backin' away he wint too far an' fell inter a crack in th' bluff.

It warn't very nice failin', but the crack warn't over four feet deep an' full uv leaves at the bottom, so bein' out'n the wind they made a more comfortable place ter spend th' night in then th' saplin'.

Pretty soon Jim hed occasion ter know he war hurt some.

The bar had tore his left arm right smart an' in fallin' his face hed got skun up dreadful. Th' b'ar walked up an' down, a-smellin' down thet crack sorter much like, but by-an'-by he went off a leetle an' lay down, I spect arguin' with hisse'f thet Jim would come out'n th' hole liken he did out'n th' saplin.'

Jim wrapped up his arm the best he could with a piece uv his shirt sleeve.

It war daylight when he waked an' th' fust thin' he seed war th' head uv thet thar b'ar a-lookin' down at him.

He knowed it war'n't no use ter holler, so he jes' lay thar thinkin' 'bout Becky an' th' babies an' leetle Jim—wonderin' ef she'd think he'd quit her.

The thought uv Becky's thinkin' enny bad uv him made him groan with a new kind uv pain, an' whin he moved a leetle he fainted away. I reckon thet war jes' 'bout'n th' time Becky got thar, fer she said she heerd a groan down in thet hole an' thin all war still. She war jes' a-goin' ter call whin she spied thet b'ar a-lookin' down inter th' crack.

'Bout ten foot to th' left uv whar Jim war fust the mounting breaks away, leavin' a pres'pus uv forty foot or more, but thar's a leetle ledge at th' top whar you kin look inter thet crack in th' bluff.

It war fur thet leetle ledge the b'ar made jes' ez Becky halted. When it clumb down she made sure it would git ter Jim (she war sure he war in thet crack), so she follered quiet ez she could, an th' snow bein' soft kept th' b'ar from hearing her—until she war right behind it—whar it war leanin' down over th' edge a-tryin' ter git inter th' crack. 'Fore it could turn on her she gave it a powerful push with her hickory stick, an' being so fur over an' so heavy the b'ar lost hisse'f, an' down he went with a crash into th' underbrush.

Becky'd gone too, only her dress war caught in some bushes an' thet saved her.

She couldn't do nothin' but lay on th' ground an' rest a spell, thin she crawled ter th' edge an' looked down ter make sure th' b'ar war dead.

Hearin' Jim groan agin she got up an' went ter him.

He war clean gone in a faint agin before she could get down ter him. When she got him to again she gave him th' flask uv milk she hed brought.

She worked with him ter keep him warm, but she couldn't do much, th' place war so norrow. It seemed an age before he got so he knowed anythin', an' she had made up her mind ter leave him an' go fur help whin Sonk and Mitch got thar. An' 'twixt 'm they soon got Jim out an' laid him on the ole army blanket I hed sent, an' they axed Becky how come he thar. She told them what she knowed, but they wouldn't believe about th' b'ar until she showed them whar it lay. Whin Mitch looked over an' seed fur hisse'f he jis' sed 'By Gosh!' an' runnin' back to whar he could scramble down made down th' side like a coon. Sonk war about ter follow, when he stopped an' turned ter Becky, tellin' her ter see ter Jim till they could come up agin. He give her a bottle uv applejack out'n his pocket, which he said he carried fur snake bite. Becky never said nothin' 'bout'n snakes most in general stayin' in th' ground in winter time, but gave a little of the liquor ter Jim an' tuck a leetle dram herse'f.

I reckon ef it hadn't been fer Sonk's snake medicine, they both a-been down sick from th' cold an' wet.

Ez soon ez th' men could git a good kiverin' uv snow over th' b'ar ter keep wild cats from pesterin' it, they kem up an' took up th' ends uv Jim's blanket ter fotch him hum. It war slow work, th' path bein' steep an' norrow, an' Jim heavy, so it war eight o'clock afore they got down. Waal, th' next day they got th' bar down, an' mon! he war a big 'un.

They skun him an' put th' meat up fur sale at th' store. A young fellar from th' North ez war a-stayin' at th' station give Becky $12 fur th' hide, ter take home ter his gal, I reckon.

The meat sold well, an' altergether I reckon Becky never seed so much money at one time afore in her life. She wanted ter divide with Sonk an' Mitch, but they wouldn't hear to it, an' she couldn't make them took nary cent. Afore th' week war out she went ter th' station an' bought shoes an' warm clothes fur all an' enough ter last two winters, an' soon Becky's fingers war busy. She made some red flannel shirts fur me, 'cause she sed they be good fer th' misery in my back.

An' whin I sed my fire hed been out a week an' I'd eat enough uv other folks' corn bread an' coffee, Becky up and sed:

“I 'low ez yer'd better stay, Uncle Duke; I've got a sight uv sewin' ter do an' yer got ter be so handy with th' babies I can't hardly spare yer.”

Arter thet we jined corn fiel's an' next year war a powerful good one fer craps an' fruit.

I tended th' chil'n while Becky went fur berries and did her peddlin'.

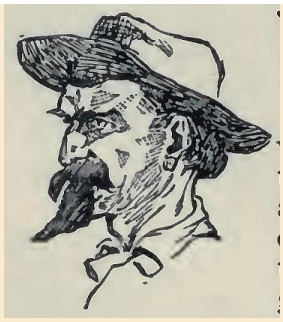
We ain't a-gettin' rich, but we has a plenty, an' I don't reckon we air got anythin' in a worldly line to ax th' Lord fur he ain't already done give us.

A CIGARETTE FROM CARCINTO, By Edward French

A Bit of Mexican Adventure.

WE were sitting in the hotel in San Antonio, and the conversation had taken that satisfactory turn and confidential coloring which it will take amongst congenial companions round an open wood fire.

We had been expressing our individual opinions about men and things, especially men, and had derived a



sleepy satisfaction from our general criticisms. There were men among us who had seen a good deal of frontier life, and, as one man said, “he had seen so many men die with their boots on, it seemed the natural end.” My nearest neighbor in the circle was a young artist from New Orleans, known throughout the city as “Jim the Painter,” from the art he practiced to get his living. He turned and asked me if I knew Jack Dunton; and when I denied the honor, he said: “Well, you ought to; he is a map of the whole Indian country.”

This awakened my interest. I found that Dunton was living in San Antonio, that his life had been really wonderful in experiences and adventures, that he was very intelligent as well as recklessly brave, and finally, that his acquaintance was worth any man's time to cultivate. Later in the evening we walked over to Dunton's office, a long, pleasant room in the second story of a flat-roofed *adobe* building that covered nearly half an acre. Both its stories were crammed full of the goods he sold—wagons, harnesses, and all sorts of agricultural tools.

Dunton's own room was a mighty interesting place, principally in its decorations. The walls and doorways were hung with bright-colored and strange-figured Mojave and Navajoe blankets, skins and weapons were scattered around or arranged as trophies, while clumsy and rude implements of Aztec and Mexican fashioning, from Yucatan to Chihuahua, were suspended against the sides, or heaped in the corners. A large open fire, with blazing cedar logs, filled the room with the aromatic odor so pleasant and characteristic of that wood, and lighted it with fitful glares. There were many interesting stories connected with this collection, and every article in the room seemed to remind Dunton of an experience or incident in his varied career. After being introduced and comfortably seated in a chair, he passed us cigars, and while we were lighting these preliminaries to sociability he drew a square of corn husk from one side-pocket of his sack coat and a pinch of tobacco from the other side-pocket, and quietly rolled a cigarette, which gave out a pungent, penetrating odor. It was not disagreeable, but it struck me as being peculiar, even for Texas. Upon remarking that it seemed different from ordinary tobacco, Dunton replied, “It is, and I have good reason to like it, for once it saved my life.”

This aroused my curiosity, and with some little urging he told us the story. “This tobacco,” said Dunton, “comes from the town of Carcinto, quite a mining settlement of *adobe* houses and stockades, surrounding a Mexican convict station in the center of the state of Chihuahua. It is made by the convicts, who treat the ordinary tobacco with the juice of a native plant, which gives it the pungent flavor you notice and, I suspect, a slight narcotic power; be that as it may, now that I am used to it, other tobacco is flat and tasteless. I was down there some years ago, trying to sell the mine-owners some carts, harness, and things in my line, and I became well acquainted with the nature of these convicts, and I tell you, I would rather take my chances in a den of mountain lions than among those fellows when they revolt. At such times they are madly insane, and nothing is too hellish for them.

“I had made a good thing of my deal and was anxiously waiting for an escort,—for I had four thousand Mexican dollars, and a man of my shape takes no chances in toting money around in that country.

“The day that I remember particularly—and you will see I have reason to—was the day before I was to go out from the mine with the mule train. That afternoon I went in the levels with Senor Bustino, one of the owners, a gentleman, every inch of him—and I tell you, no finer gentleman walks the earth than a high-caste Mexican of Castilian blood.

“I had sold them a few dozen American pickaxes, and one of the convict gangs was to try them that day for the first time. It was the first lot of pickaxes ever used in that mine, and, as the sequel proved, the last. The men were doing with them twice the business they had formerly done with their clumsy heavy hoes. Two soldiers with *escopetas* were on guard, and two overseers with pistols and heavy canes were directing the work. To get a better and nearer view, Sefior Bustino and I crowded through until we came to the rotten ledge filled with the silver, upon which they worked. The convicts stopped and gazed upon us curiously, some of them pushing back their long black hair out of their eyes and staring with undisguised wonder at me, for I was a *gringo*, a *heretico*, and a strange object to them in those early days, with my paler skin and peculiar dress. Near me was a large black fellow, bare to the waist.. He was short-necked and broad-shouldered, and his cheeks were so high as to partly close his little fierce eyes; his nose was low and flat, while his chin was sharp and prominent, with a deep scowl; in fact, a bundle of animal appetites and passions done up in a hideous form. As we passed he drew from the folds of his drawers—the only clothing he wore—a pinch of tobacco and a com husk, and making a cigarette he stepped to one of the grease-wood torches and lighted it, blowing out a great cloud of pungent, aromatic smoke from his broad nostrils, that filled the space around us with the odor you noticed from my cigarette.

“That was my first experience with that tobacco, and, indeed, my first smell of its peculiar odor, and I have never forgotten it. I dined that evening with the old senor and was introduced to his family; his wife, a Mexican lady prematurely aged—as they all are, two daughters, handsome as angels, and was shown the picture of their son, a young man who was then being educated in Paris. They were delightful people, especially to one who had been trucking for weeks across the dusty plains of Chihuahua, with only *peons* and mules for company, and we had a fiery Mexican dinner, spiced with the jokes of the village priest, who was an honored guest. At ten, with the hearty wishes of the whole family, and after the elaborate Mexican custom of withdrawal, I left them. As I sauntered out in the moonlight I could not shut out of my mind the brutish face of the convict in the mine. Perhaps the round faces and handsome eyes of the senor's pretty daughters may have emphasized the memory of the convict's ugly head; otherwise I was in a happy mood.

“I turned the corner of the street and entered a short dark lane that led toward the prison stockade. There was an occasional *adobe* house, but the street was mostly lined with the miserable mud *jacals* of the poorer Mexicans. I had hardly gotten well into it when I sniffed the same pungent odor that the convict's cigarette had given out. It startled me a trifle, conjuring up, as it did, the hideous mental picture of the man. I had but just realized this association when I heard the clanging of the cathedral bells in that hurried, nervous manner which has alarm in its every note—for the tone of a bell always partakes of the state that its ringer is in. I

heard the sound of approaching voices, loud and fierce, mixed with the alarming notes of the bells, and I stepped into the dark doorway of the nearest house. Next, there was the spatting of bare feet on the hard street, and a yelling crowd hurriedly rushed by my hiding-place, leaving a trailing smell of the same tobacco. I noticed the gleam of white handles in the moon-lighted street that I had seen in the yellow light of the mine, and then I knew that the convicts had revolted, and that they were armed with the pick-axes I had sold the mining company.

"The bells continued to clang out their terror, and the distant shouting became blended into the continuous murmur that you hear from a distant crowd of excited people. Once in a while the roar of an *escopeta* would be heard, and soon I saw a magenta glow in the sky, and I knew the town had been fired. Then followed the rapid snapping of pistols, and soon the bellow of the old brass *escopetas* denoted that the guards had mustered, and that there was an organized resistance to the revolt. All this occurred quicker than I can tell it. I concluded to get back into the broad street I had just come out of, for if there is to be shooting, I want a clear space and as much light as I can get.

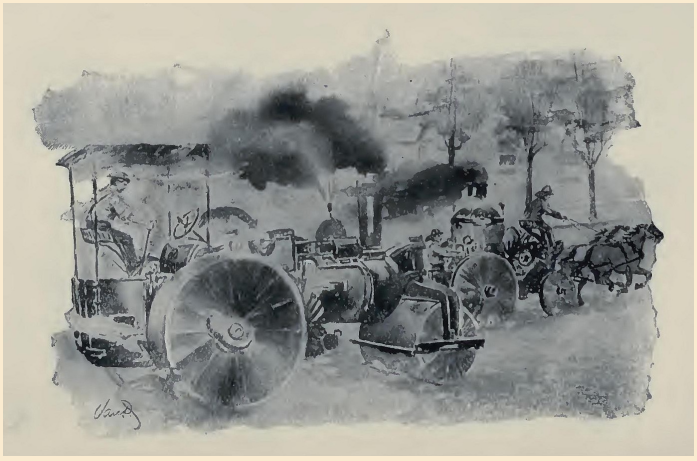
"Just as I turned the corner, on a run, with both of my colts on a shooting level—for, by the way, it is always best to come upon your enemy suddenly and surprise him before he knows you are there—I saw several bodies in the street, and in the distance some dozen men retreating. I stopped near by the first body I came to; and to my horror I saw it was the still warm corpse of Senor Bustino. As I paused and stooped to more closely examine, I thought I could detect the lingering smell of that hellish convict's tobacco. Had the fiends attacked my host's home and dragged him insensate through the streets, or had he been slain whilst hurrying to the post of duty, at the sound of the alarm he knew well the meaning of? If the former, good God! what had been the fate of his wife and lovely daughters? The very thought momentarily unnerved me; and if the convicts had not yet wreaked their vengeance, could I reach them in time to be of effective service? Louder and louder roared the tumult, nearer and nearer came the flashing, glinting lights of torch and pistol, and as I swept round into the street in which Senor Bustino's house stood I could see, pouring down the hill toward it, a demoniac gang led by the bare-breasted convict whose baleful face had haunted me.

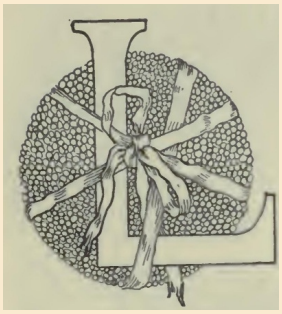
"I found the senora and her daughters alone and, thank God! unharmed; but not a moment too soon, for even as I hurried them through into the darkness of the night the convicts, with curses on their tongues, lust in their heart, and red ruin in their hands, swarmed into the house. A momentary check came as their leader and another fell in the narrow door, beneath the fire of my two revolvers, and the flames which leaped up from that erewhile home lent their last protection in the shadow they cast, which enabled us, by availing ourselves of it, to escape. By the time we arrived at my hotel the convicts had flown to the mountains and we heard the story of the revolt. If I had not smelled that tobacco I should not have concealed myself in the doorway, my life would not have been worth a picayune, and you may imagine what would have been the fate of my hostess and her household. Senor Bustino, it appeared, had fallen a victim to the high chivalry which prompted him, hearing the bell and knowing its meaning, to hastily summon his servants, and with five or six armed *peons* hasten out to overtake me and bid me return to his house until all danger was over. He had met the convicts, who had attacked him and struck him down, while most of his servants fled."

Dunton paused, made and lighted another cigarette, and continued: "I could not get away for a month, for it was not safe for a small party to leave the town. I brought out some of that tobacco as a curiosity and learned to like it. I send for more every year where it is still prepared, in the prison-pens."

"It is sometimes said, 'Follow your nose and it will take you out of danger,' and in my case the proverb proved true. Sometimes, when I sit here alone, half sleepily watching the curling smoke wreaths, I can almost see the place again, and the rings of smoke shape themselves into a horde of convict demons killing the poor old noble senor, whose elder daughter I have married. And now you know what I owe to the pungent aroma of a cigarette from Carcinto."

ANTAEUS, By Frank M. Bicknell





ATE one night, after having been a week out of town, I was returning home by a short cut across fields, when, on coming upon the street again, I found my path barred by a huge, hulking fellow, whose unexpected appearance startled me not a little. This was my introduction to Antaeus, whose better acquaintance I was to make later under rather peculiar circumstances. Antaeus was not a highway robber, but a highway roller, and when he first confronted me he was drawn up beside the road, enjoying an elephantine slumber after his hard day's labor—being, despite his formidable aspect, quiescent and inoffensive.

I am not sure that it is usual to confer upon steam-rollers the dignity of a name, but my friend had one, and I read it on the neat, black-lettered brass plate affixed to the side of his boiler, near the smoke-stack. This, I take it, was the nearest practicable approach to hanging a locket about his neck that could be managed, and I have always felt grateful to his unknown sponsors for their little act of consideration.

I cannot think of Antaeus otherwise than as a creature—not simply as a creation—as a reasoning and responsible being, rather than as a docile, slavish piece of mechanism; but to the unimaginative he seemed to be under the domination of a tolerably clean specimen of humanity whom I shall call the Driver.

It was nearly a fortnight after our first meeting when I next saw Antaeus, for he was occupied in parts of the town remote from that in which I lived. I heard him occasionally, however, as he passed through the neighborhood after dark, *en route* for another field of labor, or propelling his weary weight toward the shed under which he was lodged for his Sunday's rest. On such occasions, when I heard him lumbering by, I used to fancy he was taking an after-supper promenade and puffing a meditative cigar as he went along.

At length, after he had come several times for pleasure, or his own convenience, he made us a professional call and buckled down to work at repairing a strip of street which had long stood in need! of his services. Antaeus was with us for several weeks and during his stay I became, in a measure, “chummy” with the Driver, from whom I learned various interesting facts about my muscular friend.

Antaeus was a “fifteen-tonner,” and his market price was $4,000; he was about sixteen feet long by seven wide at his widest part; he consumed from three to four hundred pounds of coal per diem; his strength was equal to that of more horses than I can recollect; he came down upon the dust at the rate of two tons weight per foot in width; and, when put to his best, he could settle into what was intended to be its final resting place about two thousand square yards of new road material per day of ten hours. As regarded wheels he was tricycular, that is, he rested upon one roller in front and two behind, the former being also used for steering purposes. He had two small coal-bunkers in the rear, a reasonably commodious space, with a spring seat, for the Driver, and a good-sized awning overhead. He worked under a low pressure of I forget just how many pounds of steam, and when traveling for pleasure could do rather more miles a day than could a crack trotter per hour when put to his best paces.

These particulars I learned during the first week that Antaeus was busied in our neighborhood. It was thus that I took the preliminary steps toward making his acquaintance and came to be on pleasant speaking terms with him, as it were. For the subsequent intimacy between Antaeus and myself, neither he nor I were wholly responsible.

A young lady had appeared at the house across the way. She was pretty, but I noticed her more particularly on account of the seemingly boundless capabilities of her wardrobe. She had a fresh gown for every new day, or at least, in the course of the first fortnight she had displayed a series of fourteen charming costumes, which I could no more hope to describe than could a North Greenland Eskimo to write an intelligent treatise on the flora of the torrid zone. I sat at my window, not too near, every morning when she came out of doors, and admired her through a spy-glass. This may appear like a piece of impertinence—perhaps it was—but I shall urge in my defence the fact that the street between us was nearly a hundred feet wide, and our two houses were set so far back that even by using my comparatively short-sighted little telescope, I could not bring her much nearer than we might actually have been without its aid in a more crowded neighborhood.

One afternoon I stood talking with the Driver, while Antaeus was awaiting the deposit of more material by two tip-carts which were attached to his service, when she passed on the sidewalk, and I imagined she glanced at me with a certain degree of interest, as if she recalled having seen me before—or was it Antaeus who was the more worthy object of' her attention? Had I dared I should have smiled a little—merely a vague, sketchy, tentative smile—but, hardly thinking it prudent, I resisted the temptation and tried, as the photographers put it, to look natural; with the probable result of looking only cross. After having been her neighbor for more than two weeks it seemed as if I ought to have the right to speak, but proper consideration for *les convenances* forbade. It was vacation season, I was alone in the house, and, there being no womankind to make the necessary advances, I knew not how long it might be ere I could be formally introduced.

"WHILE I WAS MEDITATING SHE WALKED ON."

While I was meditating upon this state of affairs—peculiarly unfortunate for me—she walked on and disappeared around a corner. A few minutes later the fire-alarm bell sounded the number of a box near by, and presently our beautiful fire-engine, all glittering with gold and silver plate, the just pride of the town, dashed rather noisily by. At sight of this brilliant appearance Antaeus gave vent to a species of snort and started up as if to follow, but naturally his lumbering pace was no match for the swiftness of the other machine, and from the first he was left hopelessly in the rear. I went off to see where the fire was—it proved to be of small account—and forgot Antaeus entirely until that night, when he recalled himself to my mind by figuring in an odd and whimsical dream.

The scene I have just described was reproduced in part, the Driver, however, being eliminated from it. I thought I was standing beside Antaeus when the young lady appeared, only to disappear. As she went I sighed regretfully, whereupon something happened which ought to have surprised me, and would have done so anywhere else than in a dream. As if in sympathy with me, Antaeus heaved a sigh also—a most ponderous one—and thus addressed me:

"I can understand your feelings," he said, in a low, hoarse voice. "You are longing for what seems the unattainable. Alas! so am I. We might mingle our tears," he went on, beginning to exude moisture around the gauges; "or better still," he added, as if struck by an idea, "perhaps we can be of assistance to each other."

"In what way?" I asked, dubiously.

"I might help you to know *her* if you would help me to an acquaintance with the charming Electra."

Intuitively I divined that Electra must be the steam fire-engine. Big, brawny Antaeus was in love! The ludicrousness of the notion did not strike me then as it did afterward. On the contrary, it seemed to be one of the most natural things imaginable.

"Yes," he said, in response to my thoughts, "I am passionately enamored of her. I desire unutterably to gain her friendship, her esteem, her love—even though she may scorn me. I realize that her station in life is far above mine. I am only a plodder, while she is—Did you see her pass me like a flash of light this afternoon? Was she not entrancing, enthralling, irresistible! Ah, me! when she bestows her love it will be upon one of those fast, dashing railway fellows, I dare say. Yet I should like her to know that I am her friend, that I would risk any danger, that I would go through the torments of—of the repair shop, that I would give my last puff to serve her. I may be ugly and slow-going, and awkward and ungainly—Do you think I am so very ungainly, that is, for one in my walk of life?" he broke off, in rather piteous query.

"Not at all," I hastened to assure him; "when we consider your great adaptability to your—your vocation, I am sure your form would be considered remarkably symmetrical."

"Thank you!" he exclaimed, gratefully, "and whether or not such be the case, at least I am honest and

straightforward and true-hearted, though I do blow my own whistle in saying it."

"You certainly are."

"Then I trust I am not too aspiring in wishing to be numbered among Electra's friends. I hope she would not be ashamed to acknowledge me if she met me in the street."

"I should hope not, indeed," I murmured, when he paused for an encouraging word.

"Shall we call it a bargain, then, that I aid you to an introduction to the young lady, your neighbor, and in return you so contrive as to bring about a meeting between Electra and me?"

"A bargain it is, with all my heart," I assented, grasping and shaking the handle of his throttle-lever, "and the sooner the better for the carrying out of it."

"Very good; call on me to-morrow, and I will see what can be done for you."

"Shall—shall I come in business hours?" I asked, hesitatingly, thinking he might possibly prefer to attend to the matter between twelve and one.

"Of course," he answered, "in business hours, certainly. I mean business, and I hope you do."

I hastened to set his mind at rest on that point, and, after promising to come on the following afternoon, I shook his handle again, which had the effect of starting him off, and so our interview ended.

When I awoke in the morning, my dream seemed so vividly real that I resolved to risk making myself ridiculous in my own eyes and to keep my appointment with Antaeus. Accordingly, after lunch, I strolled out toward the section of highway where he was at work. Soon I caught sight of a light-complexioned wagon standing on the opposite side of the street. Attached to it were two plump, blonde ponies, garbed in russet harness, and, on the front seat, reins in hand, talking with an acquaintance upon the sidewalk, sat my young lady.

The natty vehicle had one other occupant, a sooty-faced pug, sitting up very straight on the cushion beside his mistress, with quite the air of a personage of distinction. In front of the ponies' noses was a horse of another breed, a four-legged structure of wood, upholding a sign-board, upon which was painted in glaring letters the word, "Danger," and in smaller ones, "No Passing; Steam Roller Running."

Upon this scene presently entered an important actor—I might call him the heavy villian—Antaeus, grumbling, groaning, puffing and perspiring in his efforts to consolidate the various ingredients for a durable roadbed that had been laid down in his path. As he drew nearer he gave utterance to a significant "ahem!"—as I thought—by way of calling my attention to what was about to happen. Apparently he was going to keep his part of our agreement. A suspicion of what might be his idea began to dawn upon me. He purposed frightening the ponies, an incipient runaway would ensue, and I should be enabled to play the part of heroic rescuer. There were no very original features in the scheme, but it struck me as being quite practicable nevertheless; consequently I was somewhat surprised and grieved when nothing of the nature of what I had anticipated took place.

But Antaeus was more subtle than I. He wished to avoid the appearance of collusion between us, which might have been given by the execution of the rudimentary strategem I have outlined. (Or perhaps the real explanation of it is that he knew the fat little beasts of ponies were of too phlegmatic a temperament to be disturbed by a bugaboo.) At any rate they only blinked sleepily at Antaeus and then went off into a peaceful doze, entirely unmoved by his nearness. With the black-vis-aged pug, however, it was quite otherwise. He regarded the monster as an interloper, a trespasser, and he began to bark at him angrily. Perceiving that his scoldings had no effect, he lost his temper entirely, and, jumping down from the carriage seat, ran forward toward the advancing engine and continued his barking with redoubled force and fury. His mistress' attention was now aroused, and, seeing how persistently he put himself in the track of the roller, she became uneasy. She called to him persuasively, authoritatively, beseechingly, but he paid her no heed. Apparently he had more faith in himself than had King Canute when he gave his memorable lesson to his courtiers by the seashore.

From his position in the rear the Driver could not see the dog, and I doubt if he clearly understood the situation, for he made no attempt to avert the threatened catastrophe. The ridiculous animal stood his ground and kept up his remonstrances against the invader; the alarmed young lady threw an eloquently imploring look at me; and Antaeus came on, stolid, grim and impassive. Meanwhile, strangely enough—as it seems to me now—I remained inactive until my coadjutor, justly irritated, suddenly growled out what I took to mean:

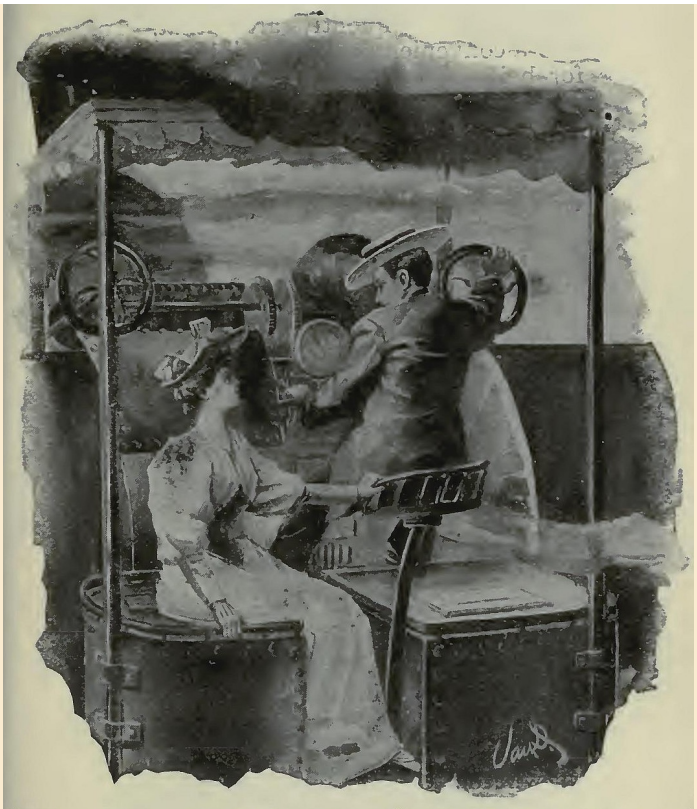
"Come! come; stupid, now is your time; why don't you bestir yourself?"

Then I awakened to a full sense of my responsibilities and opportunities, and rushing to the fore, seized the rash and obstinate pug by the scruff of the neck and restored him, rescued from the Juggernaut, to the arms of his grateful mistress.

Thus did Antaeus fulfill his share of our agreement.

This little incident broke the ice. In less than a week the young lady and I knew each other almost intimately. It transpired that we were in fact old acquaintances. That is to say, she remembered me when I was at home during one college vacation, and she hoped I had not forgotten the small miss who used to come over and play tea-party with my sister. I replied that I should hope not, indeed, and mentally took myself to task for not being surer about it. The boy of seventeen is less likely to be impressed with the girl of eight than is the young man of twenty-eight with the maiden of nineteen. I was positive that at the end of another eleven years I should have had no trouble in recalling her to mind.

I am not a tennis enthusiast, but I will admit that my white flannel suit had a chance to contrast itself with the velvety green of the lawn across the way rather frequently after that. It was a convenient and plausible excuse for being with her a good deal.



'NO; I SHALL STAY ON BOARD, TOO,' SHE DECLARED HEROICALLY.

The pleasure of her society was worth some physical discomfort, and I couldn't complain if I did feel for a week or more as if I had been given a sound drubbing. One day, after we had finished a series of games—in which mine was second-best record—who should appear, laboriously rumbling by, but my well-nigh forgotten friend Antaeus.

“What an uncouth piece of mechanism that is!” she exclaimed, turning to look at him—“a sort of caricature of a locomotive, one might say. A veritable snail for traveling, too, isn't it?”

“Yes; his—I mean it's—best speed does not exceed five miles an hour, I am told. A man might walk as fast as that with a little exertion.”

“I wonder if it is a pleasant mode of riding—in a steam-roller?” she said, half musing, her gaze still resting on Antaeus. “At least one would have plenty of leisure for viewing the scenery along the way. I should rather like to try a short ride on it.”

“Should you, really,” I asked, doubting whether or not she was in earnest.

“Yes, indeed, I should.” If she had been half in jest before she was serious now. “It would be a new experience.”

“Hardly an agreeable one for a lady, though,” I commented.

“Oh, that would be a secondary consideration,” she returned with a shrug. “I should value the experience as an experience, and I should be glad to have it to put on my list.”

I looked inquisitive and she proceeded to explain.

“I keep a diary—not a regulation school girl's diary, in which one feels bound to write something every single day of the year, whether there is anything worth recording or not—but a collection of memoranda in which I take a good deal of satisfaction. Mine is a classified diary and is contained in about a dozen different books which began as mere covers with nothing between. By putting in leaves when there was occasion the volumes grew until now several of them have attained to a very respectable thickness.”

“Might I ask, without indiscretion, for a hint as to the nature of their contents, or would that be——”

“Certainly; there is no secret about them. In fact I have been known to show their pages to certain of my friends, and, to be quite honest, I am rather proud of them. As far as I can recollect now, they are labeled with these titles: 'Books I have read, Places I have visited, Notable personages I have seen, Odd or eccentric characters I have met, Strange sights I have seen, Curious dishes of which I have eaten, Rides I have taken ——”

“Do you mean,” I interposed, “that every time you take a ride you enter an account of it in your collection?”

“I mean that whenever I ride in or on any unusual sort of conveyance I make a note of it. That particular book dates far back into my childhood. The idea of starting it was suggested to me by a ride I took on a tame ostrich in South Africa.”

My increased respect for a young lady who had ridden upon an ostrich near, if not actually in his native desert, will be understood by the untraveled.

“You have seen something of the world,” I remarked.

“Yes,” she admitted; “I have been about with my father a great deal. An uncle of mine, who abhors what he calls globe-trotting, tells people, with a look of mock commiseration on his face, that I have been everywhere except at the North Pole and in a Trappist monastery. A slight exaggeration that, and yet not so very far from

the truth either. I have visited most of the inhabited countries of the globe, I think, and I have had a chance to try riding in a good many peculiar conveyances. I have ridden on an elephant in India, on a dromedary in Egypt, in a sort of horse-litter in Persia, in a man-carriage in Japan, in a sledge on bare ground at Funchal, on a log-raft down the Rhine, on an Indian's back in Mexico, in the cab of a locomotive on the Southern Pacific, in a fast newspaper train out of New York, on an open car moved by gravity—and moved very fast, too—on that wonderful railroad in Peru, on a small landslide among the White Mountains, in a dwelling-house being moved through the streets of this town, in—— but I will spare you further enumeration.''

"I hope, however, that you will let me read the catalogue for myself some time. I no longer wonder that so successful a collector should be eager for an additional specimen. I happen to have some little acquaintance with the man who runs our steam-roller; perhaps I could arrange to have your wish for a ride gratified."

"Oh, if you *only* could!" she exclaimed, looking so hopefully expectant that I secretly vowed the thing should come to pass or I would know the most unanswerable of reasons why.

I had learned that Antaeus was neither a native nor a naturalized citizen of our town, but that he owed allegiance to a firm of contractors in a distant city, whose delegate and sole representative here was the Driver; consequently if I could prevail upon him to lend Antaeus I need apprehend no interference from the town authorities.

I began upon the Driver the next forenoon. My persuasiveness took a conventional form, for, not being gifted with an oily tongue, I was forced to trust for success in a great measure upon my chance of stupefying the Driver's conscience with the fumes of several superfine cigars. I spent about two hours in company with Antaeus, taking many turns up and down the street with him for the special purpose of observing his manners and customs. With the advice and consent of his guardian I learned to start, to stop, to reverse, and to steer to my own satisfaction. I had intended to broach the important question that day, but, fearing I might not yet have sufficiently blunted the Driver's moral sensibilities, my courage failed at the critical moment and I permitted myself the expensive luxury of procrastination.

The next day I found the task no easier, and so put it off again, but on the day after I awakened to the fact that delays are dangerous and made the fateful plunge. I frankly told the Driver the whole story, under the belief that he would be less likely to refuse the petition of a lady than one made in my own name.

If he had suspected all the while, from my persistent attentions, that I had an axe to grind he did not mortify me by showing it. He accepted my fifth cigar as he had my first, with an air of supposing it to be offered from motives of the most disinterested friendliness.

I did not meet with success in the outset. The Driver had grave doubts as to the propriety of "loaning" a steam-roller. Had he been a Frenchman he might reasonably have urged that, like a tooth-brush, *ça ne se prête pas*. However, I overcame his scruples in the end, and, probably in the belief that "if it were done 'twere well it were done quickly," he agreed to deliver Antaeus into my charge that evening.

Accordingly, not long after sunset, I went across the street and called for the young lady. I realized fully that her father and mother would not have approved of our escapade, but they were absent from home and I tried to believe it was not my duty to stand toward her *in loco parentium*. She was a bit wilful too, and I feared my remonstrances would do no good unless I carried them to the extreme of refusing my assistance, which, after my ready offer of it, would have been uncivil and unkind.

At an unfrequented spot, on a broad highway, near the outskirts of the town, Antaeus and the Driver—the former under head of steam, and both smoking—were awaiting us. We met them there by appointment at nine o'clock. After many instructions and cautions touching the fire, the water, the steam, the use of the levers, the necessity of keeping a sharp lookout ahead, etc., the Driver left me in sole command, as proud as a boy with his first bicycle.

"You find you have got into rather close quarters here, don't you?" said I, as I perched myself upon the high seat, from which the machine was most conveniently directed.

"The passenger accommodations might be more spacious, but all things considered I hardly think I shall complain," laughingly returned my companion, who had seated herself on one of the coal-boxes behind me. "I took the precaution not to wear my best frock, so I can stow myself away in small compass without fear of damage."

Having in mind the trouble I had taken, her delight in the novelty of her situation was highly gratifying to me. She eagerly asked about the functions of the various levers, try-cocks, and gauges, and insisted upon being allowed to experiment with them, as well as with the steering gear, herself. The knowledge, she said, might be useful to her in the future. Antaeus proved to be entirely docile and allowed himself to be guided as easily as a well-broken flesh and blood horse. The big fly-wheel revolved, the fussy little piston pumped up and down with an ado that seemed absurd considering the slow progress resulting, the steam fretted and hissed, the three massive rollers bore with all their might upon the hard surface of the macadam, and thus crunching, clanking, thumping and rattling, we sluggishly made our way into the obscurity of the night.

By and by, in the course of our journey, we came to a gentle rise, the ascent of which made Antaeus puff rather laboriously. For a moment my passenger looked slightly uneasy. "Why does it do that?" she asked.

"The exertion of going up hill makes him breathe a little hard, naturally," I answered, reassuring her. "He is feeling in fine condition, though," I added, inspecting the steam-gauge by the light of my lantern; "the effect of a plentiful supply of oats, doubtless."

"You speak of *it* as *he*," she said, questioningly.

"Certainly; why not?" I retorted. "He seems to me unequivocally masculine."

"True," she assented; "still in personifying inanimate objects, are they not more frequently made members of the other sex?"

"Undoubtedly they are, but it strikes me as a ridiculous custom—particularly in the case of great machines. No engine, however big, black or ungainly, but it must be spoken of by the feminine pronoun. It is hardly a compliment to your sex, is it? Think of the incongruity of putting, for instance, a huge steamboat, named for the president of the company, into the feminine gender!"

She laughed at my fancy, but her merriment did not wound my sensibilities. “So it's—I beg pardon, *his*—name is Antaeus, is it?”

“Yes, in honor of that old giant—do you recollect?—whom Hercules overcame.”

“By lifting him quite off the ground, because as often as he came in contact with Mother Earth his strength was renewed? Yes, I recall the story, and I can see a certain propriety in the name. I rather think this fellow, if he were to be lifted off the ground, could scarcely use his great strength to advantage. Imagine him turned upon his back like a huge beetle, kicking about frantically into the air to no purpose!”

“Undoubtedly he gets his grip from his contact with the earth,” said I. “As a flying-machine he would hardly be a success.”

“Doesn't it strike you that he is almost unnecessarily deliberate?” she queried, presently, with a slight show of impatience; evidently the novelty of the adventure was beginning to wear off.

“More so than usual for the reason that we are ascending an incline; but you must remember that Antaeus was not built for speed,” returned I, defending my friend.

“Evidently not. He belongs to the plodders—the slow and sure sort. He would be entered for a race in the tortoise class probably. Fancy an absconding cashier trying to escape from justice in a steam-roller! It would be funny, wouldn't it?”

I agreed with her that it would be very funny. “Or imagine an eloping couple fleeing before an irate father on such a conveyance!” I suggested, with a consciousness of blushing in the dark for the audacity of the conceit.

“Now, that is good!” she exclaimed, seizing on my idea with an eagerness that showed how far her thoughts were from taking the direction in which mine had dared to stray. “What a situation for a modern realistic, sensational drama!”

“It might be worked up into something rather impressive, I should think. In these days of bringing steamboats, pile-drivers, fire-engines, real water, and railway trains in upon the stage I don't know why a steam-roller might not be given a chance.”

“Why not?” she cried, waxing enthusiastic. “Picture the scene. Enter lovers on 'steam-roller, followed by incensed father in—in——”

“In an electric-car,” I supplied experimentally.

“Pshaw! don't be foolish!” she exclaimed thanklessly. “Followed by father in a light gig, drawn by a spirited horse. Overtakes lovers—demands his daughter—young man respectfully declines to give her up. Old gentleman prepares to come and take her. Is about to descend from gig when steamroller whistles, spirited horse begins to prance, he is obliged to keep tight hold of reins——”

“Very good!” I put in approvingly. “Stern parent threatens direst vengeance, horse cavorts alarmingly, parent rages unavailingly, resolute lover pushes throttle wide open with one hand and retains firm grip upon the helm with the other.”

“While the devoted loveress, with her own dainty hands, shovels in coal and encourages him to stand firm ——”

“By the way, that reminds me of something,” I interrupted and, getting off my elevated seat, I bent down and opened the furnace-door; “I rather think I should have given Antaeus his supper before now.”

In truth, I had neglected the fire altogether too long. I hastily threw in more coal, but it was already too late to avert the consequences of my forgetfulness. The pressure of steam was diminishing and continued to diminish in spite of all my efforts to prevent it. Back fell the indicator upon the dial, and more and more slowly worked the machinery as the power behind it became less and less.

“We shall not reach the top of the hill at the present rate,” remarked my companion. “The vital spark appears to be in danger of extinction, so to speak.”

“In very great danger,” I sorrowfully assented as, with one last feeble effort, Antaeus wearily gave up the struggle.

“Nor is that the worst of it,” I added, filled with a sudden apprehension.

“What do you mean?” she asked, disquieted by my manner, though not yet divining the inevitable outcome of the existing state of affairs.

“You had better descend to *terra firma* unless you want to go back down hill faster than you came up,” I replied significantly.

“Oh!” she exclaimed, comprehending the danger.

“Yes; the attraction of gravitation is going to take us back a deal faster than Antaeus ever traveled before. Shall I help you out?”

“Can't you put on the brakes?”

“There are none; the builders of this machine did not foresee such a contingency as this. It was not to be supposed that Antaeus ever would fall into the unskillful hands of a bungling, blundering amateur,” said I, calling up hard names for myself from out of the depths of my humiliation.

“Don't reproach yourself,” she begged; “it is I who am to be blamed.”

“Shall I not help you out before it is too late?” I interposed, as Antaeus began to gather way.

“What are you going to do,” she demanded.

“Oh, I shall stick to the ship,” I answered grimly.

“But you will get hurt if you do,” she objected.

“Antaeus will get hurt if I don't. Come!”

“No; I shall stay on board, too,” she declared heroically. “Now don't try and persuade me to desert, for I shall not do it. Can't I be of some use?”

Seeing that she was firm in her resolve to stand by me, I gratefully accepted her offer of assistance, which

indeed, was of considerable value. It was important that I should keep a firm hold upon the steering wheel, to prevent the craft from yawing, and, unless I were to be continually screwing my head about in a very painful position, I could not very well see the road over which we were traveling. From a position between the coal-boxes behind me—now the front of the conveyance—she could keep a look-out and pass the word to me when it became necessary to correct the deviations in our course. Without her help, it is more than probable that I should have run Antaeus ignominiottsly, perhaps disastrously, into a ditch before reaching the foot of the incline. Even as it was, I had my hands full.

During the ride, which certainly was one of the most disquieting, mentally and physically, that I ever have taken, we said very little to each other. I gripped the wheel, and she grasped the iron sides of the coal-bunkers, between which she stood, opening her lips only to call, “right! left!” or “steady!” as I had hastily instructed her to do for my guidance in steering. So we rumbled and rattled and jolted on down the hill, at continually increasing speed, until at length we reached the base, and I drew a deep breath of relief at knowing that the worst was over.

Arrived upon a level, our momentum gradually expended itself. From an estimated ten-mile rate—which had seemed terrific—we slowed to a five, to a three, to a one, to a snail's pace, and then something occurred which, although not threatening any danger to us personally, filled our minds with the liveliest anxiety for the safety of others. Antaeus came to a stand-still just across the railway track.

“Well?” said my passenger, inquiringly.

“Well,” I returned, blankly, as I pulled my watch from my pocket, “this is—interesting, to say the least.”

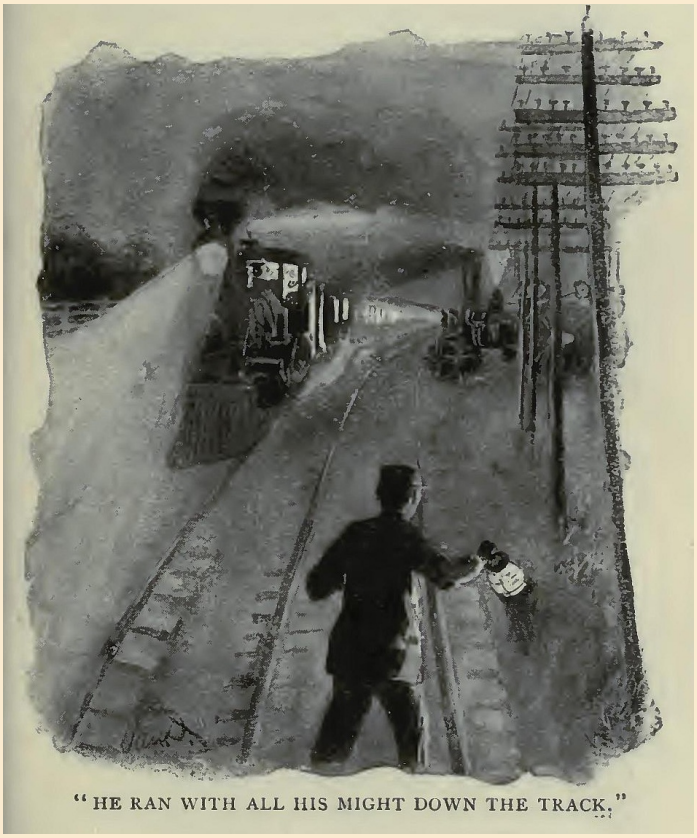
“Are there—how about trains?” she queried anxiously.

During the jolting of our forced—and forcible—descent our lantern had gone out; but there was an electric lamp near, and by its light I managed to read the hour upon my watch-dial.

“There is a train leaving the city at ten, due here at ten-seventeen; it now lacks five minutes of that. I must go to the station and report that the way is blocked. I am sorry to leave you—or would you prefer going while I wait here?”

“I think it will be better for you to go.”

“Very well, then; I'll not be long.”



“HE RAN WITH ALL HIS MIGHT DOWN THE TRACK.”

This promise of mine was ill-advised. I hurried up the track to the station, only to find it locked and deserted. It was not the principal station of the town, being one of the half-dozen smaller ones strung at short intervals along the line. In all probability it would not be opened until a few minutes before train-time. As I knew the outcoming train would stop at that station, and thus give me a chance to warn the engineer of the obstruction ahead, I did not feel particularly alarmed at not finding the agent at once. Still I was conscious of some nervous uneasiness while awaiting his arrival.

At last he came leisurely across the street, jingling his keys as he walked. As soon as he stepped foot upon the platform I went to 'him and began to tell my story. I had not proceeded far with it ere he interrupted me with a startled ejaculation.

“Great Scott! The White Mountain express!”

“What? What do you mean?” I gasped,

“New train—put on yesterday—passes here on the way in at ten-ten, and it's more than that now!” he exclaimed in staccato, as he hastily unlocked the station door, and, putting in his hand, seized a red lantern that had been sitting ready lighted on the floor within.

He did not waste any more time with me, but rushed along to the end of the platform, and then began to run with all his might down the track. I succeeded in following him at not too great a distance, although I was turning sick and giddy with all sorts of horrible apprehensions. Visions of a frightful wreck photographed themselves on my brain, the shrieks of the dying sounded prophetically in my ears, and in the midst of it all I was selfishly deploring the fact that I should be called on to pay the damages—at least to Antaeus—and wondering if I could contrive to get a hardware discount off the market price of steam-rollers.

The crossing was still hidden from us around a curve when a shrill whistling broke upon my startled ears.

“T-o-o-t!—t-o-o-t! Toot! toot!”

The agent uttered an explosive invocation to the Deity, and added in tones of despair:

“We're too late; she's onto us!”

Still we staggered mechanically forward, until suddenly, with a cry of warning, the agent sprang aside, and the express went thundering by.

“See here, young man,” my companion exclaimed angrily, “if this is a put-up job——”

“But it is not!” I interposed with indignant protest. “I don't understand it any better than you do. Certainly I left Ant—the roller sprawled across both tracks.”

“Well, I guess it ain't there now,” dryly remarked the agent, watching the rear lights of the fast-receding train, until they were swallowed up in the glare of the “local's” head-light. “I must run back,” he added, recalled to a sense of his duties. “You take this lantern and go and see if the outward track is clear. Stand between the rails and swing the lantern if it ain't. I'll tell the engineer to go slow and be on the lookout.”

In another minute I was at the crossing. I looked up and down the street for Antaeus, but neither he nor the young lady were to be seen. If that Hercules of a locomotive actually had lifted him into the air and carried him off his absence could not have been more conspicuous. But naturally such a feat>could not have been accomplished, nor had it been attempted.

The real explanation of the mysterious disappearance was this. During my absence the fire under the boiler had been getting up, until finally enough steam had made to start the machinery and so the roller had been enabled to roll itself away out of danger.

I was about to start toward town, under the supposition that Antaeus had taken that direction, when I chanced to recollect that with the levers as I had left them he naturally must go just the opposite way—that is, retrace the course over which he had lately come. Accordingly I set out on the run toward the hill. Near the foot of it I found him, diagonaled off the road-side with his nose against a tree, loudly hissing in impotent rage at the unwelcome bar to his progress.

I jumped into the engineer's place, reversed the machinery, and without very much trouble succeeded in getting him back into the road and started on the homeward way. I was putting to myself an uneasy question as to the whereabouts of my passenger, when, to my relief, I heard her voice close at hand.

“Is it all right?” she inquired anxiously; “I feared it was going to blow up or something, it made such a horribly distressing noise.”

“That very noise was a guarantee that he was *not* going to blow up,” I replied, bringing Antaeus to a stop. “He was merely getting rid of superfluous steam through the safety-.valve. I am very glad to find you again. Will you ride? I think we shall get on smoothly this time.”

Rather hesitatingly she allowed me to help her in. Then, after taking the precaution to add some fuel to the fire, and to inspect the steam and water indicators by the light of my borrowed red lantern, I opened the throttle and started on again.

“Did the train frighten you?” I bethought myself to ask, presently.

“Oh, don't speak of it,” she returned with a shudder; “I heard it coming from two or three miles away, and when it got nearer and nearer and you did not return I was almost frantic. But I couldn't do anything. I don't think it was more than a quarter of a mile distant, with the light gleaming along the rails and making it seem even nearer, when the roller began to move—but, oh, how slowly! I thought I should—well, if my hair hasn't turned gray from that scare it never will do so until the natural time for it comes, I am sure.”

“Well, the old fellow got off in time, evidently.”

“Yes; but with hardly a second to spare. He hadn't cleared the rails of the other track when the train passed. It was a frightfully narrow margin.”

“You were not on board all this while, I hope.”

“Oh, no; that would have been too foolhardy. But when I saw it was making off I didn't want it—I mean *him* —to go careering and cavorting about the country alone, so I climbed up and tried to take command. You showed me how to use the reversing-lever, and it all seemed easy when you were here, but when I was alone I didn't dare touch it for fear something disastrous would happen. All I ventured to do was to take the wheel and keep, him in the road—or rather try to do so, for I didn't succeed very well. My strength was not equal to it. He swerved a little and then got to going more and more on the bias, until at last, despite all I could do to the contrary, he ran off against a tree and was obliged to stop. Soon afterward that hissing noise began, and, fearing an explosion, I ran and got behind the wall on the other side of the street, and then—then you came. I don't think I ever was more rejoiced to see anybody in all my life.”

I resisted a temptation to make a speech, which, however much in earnest I was, might have sounded silly, and contented myself with remarking that I was glad to have arrived in such good time, and I turned my attention to the taking of her—and Antaeus—safe home.

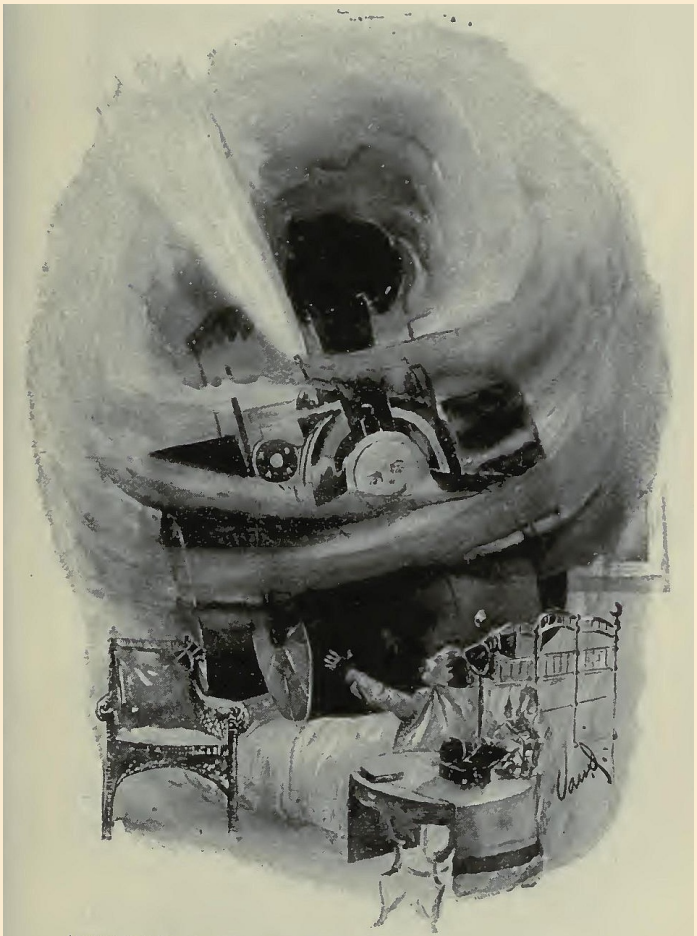
I could not get to sleep after going to bed that night. The evening's experience of itself was hardly a soporific, but there was yet another matter to occupy my thoughts and prevent my sleeping. Should I venture at the next favorable opportunity to put a certain question to a certain person? If I did so what answer should

I receive? I hoped and I feared and I doubted concerning the sentiments of the said certain person toward my unworthy self. I revolved the thing in my mind until there seemed to be little else there but revolution. Progress in any direction, certainly there was none. My body was hardly less restless than my mind.

At three o'clock it flashed across me like a revelation, that I was hungry. I had eaten a light supper hours ago, and now my stomach was eloquent with emptiness; while the blood which should be doing good service there was pulsing madly about in my brain to no purpose. I went down stairs and inspected the contents of the ice-chest. Roast pork and brown bread make rather a hearty late supper, but breakfast time was so near I thought I would risk them—and a good deal of them.

Returning to my room, I set a lamp upon a stand at the head of the bed and, taking the first book that came to hand—it chanced to be an Italian grammar—I began to read. I had gone as far in the introduction as "CC like t-ch in hatchet," when I grew drowsy. I laid down the book, my eyelids drooped, and there is good circumstantial evidence that a moment later I fell asleep, lying on my back with the upper half of my body bent into the form of a bow.

My slumbers were visited by a dream—a nightmare, composed, I estimate, of cold roast pork and brown bread, uncomfortable bodily position, the memory of certain occurrences in my past history, and an event to be described later. In this dream Antaeus figured largely. He seemed to come rolling across the bed, and me, until he had stopped upon my chest and stomach.



"HE SEEMED TO COME ROLLING ACROSS THE BED."

"What are you doing?" I asked in alarm. "Do you know you are crushing me? Get away!"

"I dare say I am. I *weigh* fifteen tons," Antaeus replied, heavily jocose. "I say," he continued with a burst of anger, "you are an honorable, high-minded sort of person, you are. What do you mean by treating me so? Have you forgotten our compact? I have given you every chance man could ask for with *her*; what have you done for me in return? Nothing. Even worse than nothing. To faithlessness you have added treachery. Not content with deceiving me, you have sought to destroy me. I suppose you hoped to see my *débris* strewn along the iron way."

I was conscience-stricken by his accusations; but I could refute a part of them. "Oh, no! oh, no!" I protested, "it was an accident, I assure you. So far from desiring such a thing, I declare that I cannot even imagine your being reduced to *débris*. I——"

"Bah!" roared Antaeus, and in his rage he began to belch forth smoke—smoke so thick and black that I thought I should be stifled by it. In another moment I awoke gasping.

One feature of my dream was a reality—the smoke. The room was filled with it, and there were flames beside. As nearly as I can guess, the situation on which I opened my eyes had been thus brought about. While I slept the wind had risen and, pushing inward the shade at the open window, had pressed it against the small, unstable stand until the latter had been tipped over, bringing the lighted lamp to the floor. The muslin

curtains had caught fire; from them the straw matting, kerosene-soaked, had flamed up, so that now a pretty lively blaze was in progress.

I sprang off the bed, made a snatch at some of my clothes, and got out of the room as soon as possible. After I had helped save everything portable, that could be saved without risk to life, I went and stood before the house in the cool air of the early dawn and watched the struggle between flames and flood. In the midst of my perturbation I noticed something that struck me as being worthy of remark. I had left Antaeus at the edge of the roadway before our gate; now the fire-engine, Electra, had been drawn up beside him. He was maintaining strict silence, but I hoped he was being well entertained, for Electra kept up an incessant buzzing—woman like, quite willing to do all of the talking. At any rate my share of our compact was now fulfilled; Antaeus and I were quits.

In the later morning I saw the young lady. My misfortunes called forth from her expressions of sincerest pity; indeed, she bitterly reproached herself for having been the direct cause of them. When I described my narrow escape from death by suffocation, she grew so pale that I thought she must feel considerable interest in me, although I immediately reflected that it could not be very pleasant to have one's next-door neighbor roasted alive.

By-and-by I told her of my two dreams, and of the way in which I finally kept faith with Antaeus.

“It is a shame that you had to burn up your house to do it,” she commented, “when a brush-heap might have answered the purpose quite as well.”

I thought—or I hoped—that the time had come for making a decisive move with some chance of its being effective. I furtively possessed myself of her hand.

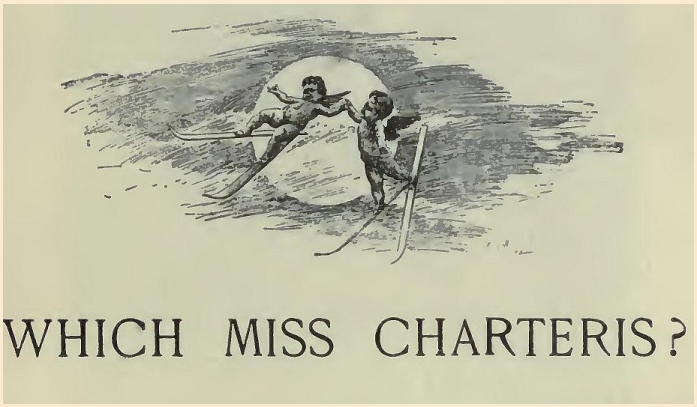
“I should not regret the house so much,” said I, “if I might hope you would deign to extend to me the favor with which Electra has made Antaeus happy.”

This was bunglingly put, but she understood me well enough, although she murmured in reply:

“You have it already; we are—acquainted. Surely you don't want—anything—more.”

But she did not withdraw her hand.

I have just heard that the town fathers contemplate purchasing Antaeus and giving him a permanent residence “within our borders.” If this report be true, I shall use all my influence—from motives of gratitude—to have him lodged beside the engine-house, so that he may be near his bewitching Electra.



WHICH MISS CHARTERIS? By C. G. Rogers

AVING completed his breakfast, Mr. Percy Darley seated himself in a n easy-chair, facing the cheerful grate-fire of ruddy anthracite, placed his toes upon the fender, and relapsed into a thoughtful contemplation of Leonard's letter.

“You had best come, my dear boy,” said the letter. “It is a sleepy little town—one of those idyllic Acadian places of which you used to rave when you were tired of the city and fretful at her ways. We can smoke our pipes and chat over the old days, before a fire in my big, old-fashioned grate. There is a noble stretch of clear ice here now. Our little river is frozen over, solid and safe, and the darkest prospects do not foreshadow another fall of snow for a fortnight. The sleighing is superb; and, as Madeline Bridges says, 'the nights are splendid.' Pack up your traps and come.”

The invitation was an alluring one, thought Darley. His head ached, and his heart was sick of the everlasting round of parties and calls and suppers. What a vision of beatific rest that idea of a chat over old times! Ah, dear old times of childhood and youth, when our tears are as ephemeral as our spendthrift dimes!

There seemed to be only one rational preclusion—to wit, Miss Charteris. Not that he thought Miss Charteris would personally object to his absence, but, rather, that *he* had an objection to leaving Miss Charteris. Miss Charteris was an heiress, and a handsome woman; to be brief, Miss Charteris being rich, and our friend Darley having the millstone of debt about his neck, he had determined, if possible, to wed her. If he went away, however, at this period of his acquaintance, when the heiress and he were becoming fast friends, some one else would doubtless step into the easy shoes of attention.

So Darley went down into the city and telegraphed his friend Leonard that he would be in Dutton on the evening train. He thought he should like to see Miss Charteris, however, before going. He walked back slowly along a particularly favorite drive of hers, and presently met this young lady with her stylish little turn-out, looking very radiant and happy on this bright winter morning.

There was some one with her—a fact Darley noticed with no great feeling of pleasure. It was not a strange thing; but, following the course of things as they had been for the past few weeks, it should have been Darley himself. This morning it was a sallow, dark young man whom Darley did not remember having seen before.

Darley explained that he was about to leave town for a few weeks, as soon as Miss Charteris had drawn up alongside the pavement to wish him goodmorning. Then she introduced him to her companion. “A very old friend—Mr. Severance—just arrived from Australia.”

“Dear old Dutton!” said Miss Charteris, looking reminiscent. “You must not break any trusting hearts down there, Mr. Darley; for the Dutton maids are not only lovely, but proverbially trusting.”

“You know Dutton, then?” Darley answered, surprised.

“Oh, yes! I have a very dear aunt in Dutton—oh, but you will see! I spent some of my happiest days there. So did you, I think, Lawrence.”

“Yes,” said Mr. Severance reflectively, “days almost as happy as the present day. Don't you think, Mr. Darley, that a man's best years cluster round the age of ten?”

Darley could not help agreeing to this. All men, provided their youth has been happy, think so. Darley said good-by, and walked on.

Who was this fellow Severance? *She* called him Lawrence—*Lawrence*, by Jove! There was something in it—rather old schoolmates, too, they had been, and what might they not be now? It was more pique than disappointment which caused Darley to wish momentarily that he was not scheduled for Dutton. However, he must stand the hazard of the die.

His things were soon packed; he also supplied himself with a box of the cigars Leonard and he used to love in “the days that are no more,” and a copy of “Outing.” And ten hours later the train, with a jovial roar, ran into the little town, where the lights gleamed cozily against the snowy background, and the sleigh-bells seemed to bid him a merry, musical welcome.

A short, erect, trimly built man with a finely chiseled face and a brown skin that seemed to breathe of pine woods and great wide, sunlit rivers grasped Darley's hand as he stepped to the platform.

“Well, old man!” exclaimed the brown man, cheerily. “Awfully glad you've come! Come this way! Here we are, Joseph! Step in!”

“By Jove! it *is* wintry here, isn't it?” said Darley, as he slid under the buffalo robes. “What a peerless night!”

After supper the two men made themselves thoroughly comfortable in great leather chairs before Leonard's promised fire, and smoked and chatted.

“You look just the same, old boy,” said Leonard, scanning Darley carefully. “But the hair is a little thin in front there, and I think I see the growing spot of baldness, as Ike Marvel has it. Did you ever read that great book of his, 'A Bachelor's Reveries?' No? Well, you should. I find it sweetest company. Yes, you are the same old sobersides—a great deal deeper than you look, as the little boy said when he fell into the well. And not married yet, eh?”

“Who, the little boy?”

“No; you, you rogue! I should have thought you would have gone off long ago.”

“Why?”

“A hard question to answer. Are we not always in a condition of mild wonder that our friends have not gone over to the married ranks, when we ourselves have not? However, from floating gossip—that tongue's flotsam—I have heard that you meditate going over.”

“Eh?” said Darley, pricking up his ears.

“Why,” answered Leonard, knocking the ashes out of his pipe, “Beau Brummel cannot pay court to a beauty without the world knowing it! I, even I, have heard of Miss Bella Charteris. She is not the sort of girl, if I may make so bold, that I would have imagined you pinning yourself to. I should have thought some quiet, sober, angelic little woman like——”

“Like who?”

“Well, I was going to say like her sister,” said Leonard softly, bending his head over his pipe as he slowly refilled it. “But you do not know her sister, I think.”

“Why, I did not even know Miss Charteris had a sister!” exclaimed Dar-ley in amazement.

“No? Why, Miss Florence Charteris lives here—in Dutton!”

“Miss Charteris mentioned an aunt, and hinted at some one else whom she said I would see, now that I think of it.”

“Irony, I suppose,” said Leonard quietly, smiling a queer little smile. “Yes, Miss Charteris the second lives in Dutton: a quaint, gray little life, good, patient, and God-like. She is the sweet angel of Dutton. But tell me, Percy, are you in love with your Miss Charteris?”

“I am afraid she is not my Miss Charteris,” said Darley, smiling. “And to be candid with you, Jack, I am not in love with her—for which, perhaps, I should be thankful. However, if Miss Charteris *does* accept me, which I think is highly improbable, I shall marry her for money.”

Leonard shook his head. “I thought that was the way the wind lay,” he said sagaciously. “Don't do it,” he added tersely, after a pause. “Take an old fool's advice—don't do it. I think you would only live to regret having sold yourself into bondage. That is what it would amount to in your case. You are not built upon rough enough lines, I know, not to care at having your poverty sneered at and constantly thrown in your face. It is a puzzle to me how any man with any sense of independence and honor can sell himself, as some men do; and it is beyond my understanding how *you*, with your fine feelings and high ideal of manhood, ever thought of such a thing.”

This was certainly rubbing it in, Dar-ley thought. But, then, Leonard was such an exceptionally odd fellow, with his one-man-in-a-million code of chivalry and his ethical eccentricities. Still, Darley shrunk at the castigation, because he knew that the feelings that prompted it were sincere.

“But I am terribly in debt, Jack,” he said, almost deprecatingly. “What is there left for me to do?”

“What is there left? The opportunity to fight it out!” retorted Leonard. “Retrench. In a year, or two at most, unless you are *hopelessly* insolvent, if you live without the profitless pleasures that have brought you to this pass, you can come out triumphantly independent.”

Darley shook his head. “I am afraid I could not stand the strain, Jack,” he answered, almost sadly. “A fellow

of your caliber might. How is it, by the way, that you yourself are still in single harness?”

Leonard was silent, gazing in the coals with almost a melancholy air.

“Perhaps I should not say so,” he said at last, “yet you have been so frank with me; but I do not like the subject when applied to myself. However, there is but one answer, which is embodied in that one word that hangs like a pall before the eyes of the young literary aspirant—*refused*. I shall always be single, Darley. Always the same old solitary sixpence, with my rods and guns and dogs and books. Not bad companions, all of them, when used well—faithful, too. Eh, Rosy?”

The beautiful hound addressed raised her head and looked pathetically at her master, rubbing her nose in a sympathetic way against his leg.

Darley felt deeply interested. “What was the trouble, old fellow?” he ventured.

“The whole story is contained in that one word—refused. I never cared for but one woman; and *she* did not care for me—at least, not enough to marry. Which was, after all, the most natural thing in the world, I suppose. I could not blame her, could I, since I would only marry for love myself? It is not much of a story, is it?”

“On the contrary, I think there is a great deal in it!” answered Darley, warmly. “I think I see that you loved this woman as only men with hearts like yours can love—once and for all.”

“Loved her? My love has no past participle, Darley! I shall always love her! I shall always think her the sweetest woman in the world, and the best! There is no other like her—God bless her! But you are sleepy, old fellow; and even Rosy is yawning and thinks it is time all decent people went to bed. Let us have one of the old-time horns, one of those old camp-fire nips—and then to bed. To-morrow you shall see our little town. By the way, did you bring your skates?”

“Skates! I haven't seen one for five years.”

“Never mind. I have a dozen pairs, and I dare say we can fit you. Do you curl? No? Well, you shall learn. We have the finest rink within a hundred miles. Here's your room, old fellow! Good-night, and rosy dreams and slumbers bright, as Sir Walter says.”

The days passed happily for Darley. The ice was perfect; and though he had not skated for years, his old power over the art came swiftly back. The river was one glaring, narrow, indefinite sheet of incomparable ice. Then there was the curling-rink, of which Leonard was an ardent devotee. It is a quiet, satisfying sport, this “roaring” game, and has peculiar charms for the man who has turned forty. The snow-bird shooting was good, too, out in the broad white fields beyond the town. And one glittering night the pair drove out into the country, and went on a hunt after some depredatory foxes with some farmers. They did not get the foxes; but they had a jolly supper at the farm-house, and an eight-hand reel in the kitchen, which Darley thoroughly enjoyed—more, he affirmed to his black-eyed partner, than any ball in the city he had ever attended.

One morning, Leonard having some business to detain him, Darley went off alone for the customary spin down the river. Skating out of the town and away past the white fields and the farmhouses, he presently espied a small feminine figure ahead of him, gliding quietly along. Suddenly the figure tripped and fell. One skate had come off and flew out to the center of the ice.

Darley sped to the rescue. The little figure in gray made a futile attempt to rise.

"ARE YOU HURT?"

"Are you hurt?" exclaimed the rescuer as he wheeled to a short stop.

The lady looked up, and Darley saw the likeness in an instant. It was the other Miss Charteris—not at all like his acquaintance of the city. A rather pale, patient little face, with quiet gray eyes set far apart; a plain face, Darley said to himself. But on second thought he decided that it was not.

"I am afraid I have hurt my ankle," said this little woman in answer to Darley's inquiry. "I tried to stand up, but I got a twinge that told me something was wrong."

"Let me help you. Which foot is it?"

"This one," indicating the foot minus the skate.

Darley lifted her up. "Now you keep the injured member off the ice," he said, "and I will skate you to shore."

"It was all my fault," said the patient, as Darley knelt down and removed the remaining skate. "I would put on these old-fashioned things just because the blades are splendid."

Darley secured the refractory skate and removed his own. Then he asked how the ankle felt.

Miss Charteris attempted to stand upon both feet, but sat down upon the bank instantly.

"It *does* hurt," she said, as if unwilling to admit the painful fact. She looked at Darley almost appealingly, then about her. The nearest house was a quarter of a mile away. Finally she looked back at Darley, with an expression that seemed to say, What are we going to do now, I wonder?

Darley made up his mind quickly. He always did when a woman was in the question. "You can't walk," he said; "I shall have to carry you."

Miss Charteris' pale cheeks assumed a rapid flush. "I can walk," she said, hastily.

"Very well," said Darley, gently. "Take my arm."

A few painful steps proved to Miss Charteris that she *could* walk, at the expense of excruciating agony. So, being a sensible little soul, she stopped.

"You see, it is impossible," said her knight. "You will have to let me carry you, Miss Charteris. I beg your pardon for not introducing myself. I am Mr. Percy Darley, a guest at Mr. John Leonard's."

"I knew you were Mr. Darley, but I don't see how you knew that I was Miss Charteris," said that young lady, looking surprised, and quite forgetting her ankle.

"I have the pleasure of knowing your sister, and I recognized the likeness," answered Darley, truthfully. "Now, will you allow me? Or I am afraid I shall have to take the law into my own hands."

"I am not the law," retorted Miss Charteris, attempting to proceed.

"The very reason that I should become the law," answered Darley, laughing.

“I think I can *hop*,” said the girl, desperately. She did so for a few yards, and then came to a last halt. Hopping through deep snow proved rather heavy exercise.

“I am afraid you will have to carry me,” she said in a tone of surrender.

Darley picked her up. She was no weight, this little gray thing, and Darley was an athletic young man. Despite the snow, it did not take him long to reach the farm-house.

The farmer's wife was a kind soul, and knew Miss Charteris. She also knew a sprain, she said, when she saw one; and Miss Charteris' ankle was sprained. So, while the injured member was being attended to by the deft hand of the farmer's wife, Darley posted off to the town for Miss Charteris' aunt's sleigh, the farmer being absent with his own.

Darley secured the sleigh, drove back to the farm-house, and his charge, her ankle warmly and carefully wrapped up, was placed in the cutter and driven home. The family doctor had already arrived, and Darley took his leave.

“May I call and see how you are get-ing on?” he ventured as he said good-by.

“I shall be happy if you will,” said Miss Charteris. But the gray eyes seemed to say to Darley, Could you think of not doing so?

“I am afraid you are in love, or on the way,” said this young man to himself as he walked briskly to his friend's house. “In love, young fellow, and with a real woman, not a woman of the world, but a genuine sweet woman, one worth the loving.”

He related the story as simply as he could to Leonard, and the latter listened quietly. But Darley did not observe the odd look in his friend's eyes during the narration, nor did he guess that Leonard was saying to himself, Ah! my young friend, and have you, too, fallen at the first shaft?

“Shall we go round to the rink?” suggested Leonard the following evening, after dinner, as they sat over their pipes.

“I think I will stroll round and see how Miss Charteris is,” said Darley, smoking furiously. “I will call in at the rink afterward, eh?”

“Very well, old fellow,” was all Leonard said.

Darley found Miss Charteris' ankle improved. The doctor had pronounced it a severe sprain, had prescribed some wonderful liniment, and had alleviated the pain.

“But I shall not be able to be out again for three weeks,” said the invalid, plaintively, on the occasion of a second visit of anxious inquiry. “It is too bad; for I think open-air skating the most exhilarating of all sport! It always seems to lift me up.”

“It didn't seem to lift you up yesterday,” suggested Darley.

“No, indeed. I have thought since that I should be very grateful to you, because, if you had not happened along, I am sure I don't know what I should have done.”

“Don't talk like that, please,” said Darley, gravely. It is wonderful the aversion a young man has to being thanked in a case of this sort—at least, his profession of dislike. “I cannot tell you how unfortunate I regard the doctor's mandate,” said Darley after one of those awkward pauses between two young people who fancy, on a short acquaintance, that they have a tender regard for each other. “On your own account, of course, because I can understand how you feel over losing such a chance as the present ice affords; but chiefly, I am selfish enough to say, on my own behalf, because by the time you are able to skate again, even if the ice is still good, my visit will have come to an end; and I had been hoping, presumptuously enough, I know, to see you often.”

“Will it be really imperative for you to return so soon?” said Miss Charteris, working rapidly at the woolen hood on which she was engaged.

“I am afraid so,” answered Darley, with something very like a sigh. “I could not infringe on too much of Leonard's time——”

“Ah! it is not the city which calls, then?”

“No, it is not the city,” answered Darley, laughing, and being angrily conscious that he was flushing. “But Jack is such a dear good fellow, that I know he would not dream of sending me away.”

Miss Charteris' eyes were on her work, and she plied her fingers rapidly.

“Do you know Leonard very well, Miss Charteris?” continued Darley, as the girl did not venture a remark.

“Oh, yes!” The tone might have suggested that Miss Charteris was agitated; but Darley went on, radiant and sublimely ignorant.

“He is a grand fellow—the one man in the world that I would fall down and worship! I think Shakespeare must have had him in his vaticinal eye when he put those perfect words, that immortal eulogy, in the mouth of Antony: 'His life was gentle; and the elements so mixed in him that Nature might stand up and say to all the world, '*this* was a man!'”

The maid came in and asked if she should light the lamps.

“Not just yet. I prefer this twilight. Do you, Mr. Darley?”

“Very much—for itself. It is very satisfying and soothing, and always seems to me like a benediction. But it is very bad for your eyes, and very soon I shall be only able to half see your face.”

“Which will be very good for *your* eyes. Well, I have done work for today.” Miss Charteris laid the hood away, which Darley had been regarding curiously, and folded her hands in her lap. The action and the moment made Darley think of the “Angelus;” the “Angelus” made him think that it was getting late, and that made him think that it was time to go. The lamps, he said, had come round, and——

“No, sit down, unless you really want to go,” said Miss Charteris. She was remarkably frank, this young lady. “The lamps have not come round; and, on the contrary, I think that my disinclination for them should be taken as proof that I do not think it is time for you to go. Besides, the days are cruelly short now.”

“I find them so,” answered Darley, softly. “Leonard is making everything so comfortable for me that I do not know what I shall feel like when the curtain has rung down. It will seem like awaking suddenly from dreamland to cold earth again. I am sure I shall feel like one of those mountains falling into the sea of dullness that Poe describes: 'Mountains toppling evermore into seas without a shore.'”

“You seem a great admirer of Mr. Leonard,” ventured Miss Charteris. There was just the slightest suspicion of jealousy in her tone, which Darley did not notice. Was it because he had inadvertently attributed his loneliness at leaving to his friend's kindness, and not paid her that little tribute of homage which women love? But who knoweth the heart of woman? Darley longed to tell her why he should feel lonely when he came to say good-by; but he did not wish to garnish such a declaration with quotations from poets. Let a man speak from the inspiration of the moment when he tells his love, or hints at it.

“Admirer!” he echoed, in reply to Miss Charteris' remark. “It is more than that. Just think! We were inseparable for years. I wish we had remained so. No one who knows Jack Leonard as I have known him could help thinking him a perfect man, noble and generous, as he is!”

“We are one in that opinion,” answered Miss Charteris, quietly. “And, next to esteeming a noble man, I can esteem his friend who can speak so unselfishly and sincerely of him, as you have done.”

Darley felt touched—not so much at the words, but at the way in which they were spoken, gently, deeply, as if breathing of sincereness. But he did not distinguish anything beyond that in the grave eulogy to Leonard and himself.

At length the lights *had* to be brought in, and Darley rose to go.

“You said you felt it unfortunate that I should be unable to skate, because you had been hoping to see me often,” said Miss Charteris. She was conscious of a slight flush, but she went bravely on. In certain circumstances a woman *has* to be what prudes call bold. “Did you mean it?”

“How could you doubt that I meant it? I certainly did mean it.” Darley was a little confused by this frankness. All true women must be coquettes in some degree, was Darley's creed. But Miss Charteris was hardly a coquette even in a slight degree, he thought. It was not frivolousness that prompted her to speak in this way.

“Because, if you meant it,” continued this charming young person, “I shall be glad if you will come and see me as often as you like, if you will not find it dull.”

Miss Spooner, Miss Charteris' aunt, came in at this moment and spoiled the eloquent look of reproach that Darley gave her niece.

“Did you ever see such a girl!” exclaimed Miss Spooner in her high but pleasant voice. Miss Spooner's speech was emphatic, and endowed with realism. Darley felt like saying that he never had, indeed. “*I* never did! Going into mourning, I believe, because she can't go out and break another ankle! You wouldn't catch *me* on that ice! I saw it to-day from the bridge—horrible, shiny, treacherous stuff! Not going already, Mr. Darley? Better stop to tea.”

Darley said he could not stop to tea *that evening*; which meant that he could some other evening, of course, and would be unspeakably happy to do so. All of which Miss Spooner understood; and so she extended her hospitality to him for the next evening.

“Do you know, Percy, I believe you are going to marry Miss Charteris,” said Leonard, quietly, one evening. “*Our* Miss Charteris, I mean.”

“What makes you say so?”

“I believe you are in love with her; in fact, I know you are. And I hope you will. Nothing could make me happier.” Darley looked the satisfaction he could not speak at this little speech.

“I am in love with her. But I am not good enough for her,” he said, humbly. “I have been a worthless beggar all these years——”

“You can prove your worth,” said Leonard, warmly. “And you *must*, if you marry Florence Charteris. I know you are not worthless; but you must let the good come to the surface.”

“I shall work,” answered Darley, earnestly. “I begin to feel now the approving glow that comes to a man when he anticipates marrying a woman he loves. But why should I anticipate? I have not the slightest reason to believe that Miss Charteris cares a jot for me!”

“Is that true, Percy?” questioned Leonard, sharply.

Darley did not know whether it was true or not. He did not like to be sanguine, he said. No; he had no reason to think Miss Charteris cared whether he went back to town to-morrow. Not an item of which Leonard believed.

“I hope earnestly you will win her,” he said again. “But you will have to retrench. Florence Charteris is as poor as a church mouse.”

“I am heartily glad of it,” said Darley, warmly. “I shall be the man I have never yet been if I win her.”

“Well, you will win her,” said Leonard. “I feel it in my bones.”

So the days went round; and each one found Darley at Miss Spooner's. Even little Dutton had begun to watch with interest the outcome of this quiet wooing of the little lady whom all the town loved. The evolutions of acquaintance had merged rapidly into the sweeter plane of an almost wordless courtship; but as yet Darley had not ventured to speak He felt fearful lest his dream should be dispelled; and yet, though he was not a vain man, he felt that this lovable little woman cared for him. He could not go back to town and leave his love unspoken, however; because if he had done so this little story would not have been written. And at length came the day when he felt that his visit had been prolonged beyond the limits that even close friendship

allows.

“I am going away to-morrow,” he said on this eventful afternoon. It was just such an afternoon as that first one which he had spent there. It was growing dusk; and through the window they could see the red lights of home, those terrestrial apostles of Hesperus, punctuating the white landscape.

“I am going away to-morrow,” repeated Darley. Miss Charteris said nothing, but gazed out of the window.

“Why don't you say something?” he burst out. “Have you nothing to say?”

“What should I say? Do you want me to say good-by? Is it such a sweet word, then, that you are anxious that I should say it now?”

Darley knelt beside the little dusky figure in the rocker. How sweet it is to have the woman you love speak to you like this, and to hear her voice tremble, and to feel that she cares for you!

“No, I don't want you to say good-by,” he said, very gently. “I want you to tell me not to go. Can't you see that the thought of leaving you has been like the thought of eternal darkness to me? I love you, and I want you for my own, always, that I may never know the bitterness of good-by!” Miss Charteris turned her head, and Darley saw that the gray eyes he loved so well were wet. She put out one little white hand till it rested on his.

“Stay!” she whispered.

After a while, when the lamps—those horribly real and unromantic things—were brought in, they talked of other matters. But both seemed very happy, and ready to talk of anything. Even the mysterious hood, which was now completed, came in for a share of attention, and the inquisitive Darley learned that it was for a “poor old soul,” as Miss Charteris expressed it, who lived in a wretched little shanty with a worthless grandson, at the other end of the town. By-and-by Miss Charteris said:

“I have some news for you. Bella was married yesterday. Can you guess to whom?”

“No, I cannot,” answered Darley, almost breathlessly. Bella was the Miss Charteris of the city. He did not know whether to feel glad or indifferent, but he was free of the gentlest touch of spleen. A woman will be conscious of a twinge of pique when she hears that a man with whom she has had some little love affair has married some one else. But Darley was not conscious of any such sensation.

“It was very quiet,” continued Miss Charteris. “At least, I gather so from the paper which tells me of it. Bella never writes me, and not even on this occasion has she done so. However, she is now Mrs. Lawrence Severance.”

“Oh!” exclaimed Darley in a superior tone, which testified that he knew something about it. Then he mentioned having met Severance. He had not said anything of the occurrence before, not caring for Miss Charteris of the city as a subject of conversation with her sister, for reasons best known to himself.

“There is quite a little story about it, you know,” continued Miss Florence. “Lawrence, you know, and Bella have been lovers ever since they were so high, and Bella was Aunt Mary Spooner's favorite. When Aunt Mary died she left a great deal of money for Bella when she should come of age, stipulating, however, that Bella should have only a certain allowance till she was beyond a marriageable age.”

“And, pray, what age is that?” asked Darley, laughing.

“I should not have cared to ask Aunt Mary that question. The reason was that Lawrence was the son of an old sweetheart of Aunt Mary's, who had jilted her without any mercy; and so the sins of the father were visited upon the head of the son. 'Marry Lawrence, my dear,' says Aunt Mary, 'if you like, but you don't have my money. Florence shall have it the day you marry Lawrence Severance.'”

Darley started as if stung. “Eh?” he exclaimed, “I don't understand!”

“Then listen. 'Oh, ho!' quoth Lawrence, when he grew up and understood the story. 'So that is the way of love, is it? Well, there are more fortunes than Aunt Mary's in the world.' And away went Lawrence, nothing daunted, to win—what I hear he has won—double the fortune that Bella, in marrying him, hands over to me.”

“Then you mean to say that this—money comes to you; that you are a rich woman, in fact?” Darley's tone was almost bitten.

“Yes!” answered Miss Florence, gleefully, and clapping her little hands. “Aren't you glad?”

“Glad? I hate it!”

“Hate it?”

“Yes, hate it! I was glorying in the fact that if I won you I would marry a poor woman. Now—” Darley did not finish his sentence.

“You must not talk like that,” said Miss Florence with some asperity. “It is very wrong, and it hurts me, although I know I should be pleased. But I know you love me for all that. Money is a very good thing—God's gift in the hands of those who use it well. There is a great deal of good that we can do with Aunt Mary's money. She was very good herself to the poor, despite her unnatural dislike for Lawrence Severance; and I should like her to know that her mantle had fallen on worthy shoulders. You and I shall use this money to a great purpose.”

“But you don't know what a happy thing it has been to me, this thought of winning you and proving my love by earnest work!”

“And need that resolve be dissipated?” said Miss Florence, gravely. “You shall do that. There is a great deal of work to be done.”

Leonard met Darley on his return, and drew him into the light.

“I have won her, Jack!” said the younger man, grasping his friend's hand. “The sweetest and the noblest

woman God ever made!”

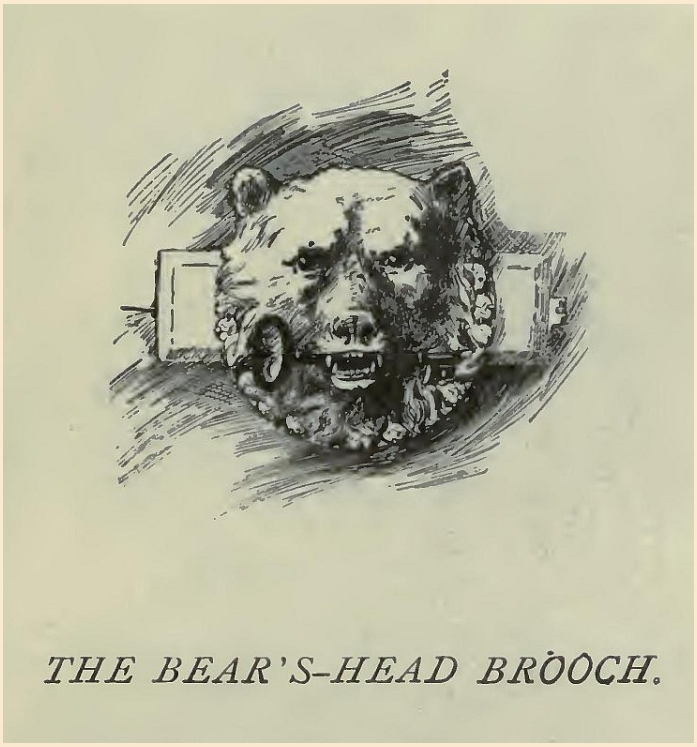
“I see it in your face,” said Leonard, huskily. Even Darley could not fail to notice the change in his friend's voice. “What is the matter, old man?” he exclaimed. “You——”

“Nothing, nothing, my boy,” Leonard answered quickly. “But promise me one thing: that you will make her a noble husband, always—always!”

Then Darley understood.

“Dear old Jack!” he said tenderly. “What a fool I have been! Can you forgive me?”

“There is nothing to forgive, my boy—nothing. But you must always be good to her. But never get angry because another man besides yourself worships your wife.”



THE BEAR'S-HEAD BROOCH.

THE BEAR 'S-HEAD BROOCH, By Ernest Ingersoll

"TOM'S REVOLVER HAD EMPTIED HALF AN OUNCE OF LEAD INTO ITS BRAIN"—P 957.

HE story I am about to narrate happened this way, Thomas Burke and I were old schoolmates. But his course and mine had been widely divergent for a score of years, so that by the time he had brought his family back to New York, and our acquaintance could be renewed, many untold things had happened to each.

I knew Tom had won his fortune by mining in the Rocky Mountains. It was rumored that his accomplished wife also had wealth in her own right, but Tom never had much to say in regard to his financial matters, and I did not like to question him notwithstanding our intimacy. I had dined with him two Christmases in succession, and now for the third time had eaten my Christmas dinner at his table.

On each of these occasions Mrs. Burke had worn at her throat a magificient brooch which I had never seen at any other time, though I had met her often when such an ornament would have been suitable enough. This brooch was a bear's face, holding in its teeth a tiny steel key. It was a marvel of delicacy in the goldsmith's art, and evidently very costly; for the eyes were each a ruby, and the head was encircled with large diamonds, half hidden by hairs of gold, as though they represented a collar round bruin's hirsute neck.

“Tom,” I said, when Mrs. Burke had left us to ourselves after dinner, “I am very curious about that bear's head brooch your wife wears. Why do I never see it except at Christmas? I am sure it has a history, and if there is no secret about it I wish you would enlighten me.”

“Well,” said my old friend, “that is rather a lengthy story. There is no secret about it—at least none to keep from an old chum like you. As for the brooch, that's only an ornament I had made some years ago; but the design and the little key—which is a real key—remind Marion and myself of what we call our Christmas story, because it culminated on that day.

“When you and I left the old university in 1870, and you came here, and I went West——”

But if I were to tell the story as he did, it would hardly be as plain to you as it was to me. I must write it out.

When Tom Burke left the university after his graduation he took the few hundred dollars which were the measure of his capital and went to the Rocky Mountains to seek his fortune. In the autumn of 1871 he became the superintendent of the Crimson Canyon Mining Company in Southern Colorado, where he found as assayer, and scientific assistant generally, a queer, learned and proud old Scotchman named Corbitt. This man had been one of the “Forty-niners” and had made a fortune which he had greatly enjoyed while it lasted, and the loss of which, in some wrong-headed speculation, he never ceased to deplore.

Now, a few weeks before Tom's arrival at the camp, Corbitt's home had been brightened by the coming of his daughter Marion, on what he told his envious acquaintances was a “veesit,” implying that she could not be expected to make her home there.

And truly this remote mountain settlement, inclement in climate, uncouth, dusty, filled with rough men, and bountiful only in pure air and divine pictures of crag and glen, icy-blue peaks and chromatic patches of stained cliff above or flower meadow below—all this was anything but the sort of place for a girl like her to spend her maiden days in.

Perhaps it was not quite a case of love at first sight between her and Tom, but certainly the winter had not passed before each had confessed that there was no one else in the world beside the other whose presence

much mattered in the way of happiness.

But that seemed to be the end of it, for Corbitt gave young Burke to understand most decisively that he could hope for nothing more—an engagement to marry was out of the question.

“Love, let us wait,” was Marion's last word, when, on her first and last tryst, she had stolen away to meet him, and he counted her kisses as a miser counts his gold.

“Let us wait. I care for nobody else, and nobody can marry me against my will. We are young yet. Who knows what may happen? You may get money enough to satisfy papa—I don't suppose he holds me at a very, very high price, do you? Or I may be freer after a while to do as I wish.”

This was commonplace advice enough, but Tom saw both the good sense and the pure love in it, and accepted the decree, steeling his heart against the impulses of rage and revolt.

And then, quite unexpectedly, Mr. Corbitt resigned his place and went to Denver, taking his family with him. The same week the mine changed owners, and Burke was superseded by a new superintendent; and so, almost at a stroke, the lad lost both his sweetheart and the weapon by which he was to fight for her in the business tournament of the world. However, the latter evil was presently remedied, and he worked on, saving his money and teasing his brain for suggestions how to make it increase faster.

At that time the mighty range had never been very carefully prospected. Men had, indeed, ascended Crimson Creek to its sources in search of the deposits of quartz whence the auriferous gravels below had been enriched, but they had brought back a discouraging report. Tom was not satisfied to accept their conclusions. He was confident, from the geological and other indications, that treasures of ore lay undiscovered among those azure heights. At last, resolved to see for himself, he enlisted the help of a young miner and mountaineer named Cooper, and one day late in August they started.

After passing the pillared gateways of the Canyon, and ascending for a few miles the great gorge down which the creek cascaded over boulders and ledges of granite and rounded fragments of trachyte and quartz, you come to a noble cataract leaping into the Canyon from the left through a narrow gash or depression in the wall. By climbing up the opposite slope a little way, you see that this stream comes tumbling white and furious down a long rugged stairway of rocky fragments before it reaches the brink, whence it shoots out in the air and then falls in a thousand wreaths of dangling vapor.

“Cooper,” Tom called out to his companion, who was more comrade than servant, “I guess we'll camp here. I want to examine this side gorge a bit.”

“It looks to me,” remarked Tom, “as if this had formerly been the main stream, and had carried pretty much all the drainage of the valley until a big landslide—and it didn't happen so very long ago either—dammed the exit of the valley and changed the shape of things generally, eh?”

“That's about the size of it, I guess. But, I say, ain't that smoke down there by the lake?”

“AIN'T THAT SMOKE DOWN THERE BY THE LAKE?

“I reckon we've got time enough to go and see. It ain't far down there, and the moon'll show us the way back if we get late.”

Noting their bearings, they began the descent toward the lake and presently came out upon its border, where the walking was easier. Advancing cautiously half a mile or thereabout, they again caught sight of the smoke through the bushes—a feeble column rising from some embers before a small shelter of boughs and bark that hardly deserved the name of hut. A skillet, a light pick and shovel, and one or two other household articles lay near by, but nothing alive appeared.

“No Injun 'bout that,” said Cooper.

“No, Cooper; more likely a prospector.”

Hallooing as they neared the hut, a lean and miserable dog rushed out and greeted them with ferocious growls, whereupon they heard a weak voice speaking to him, and saw a frowsy gray head and a bony hand, clutching a revolver, stretched out of the opening that answered for a door.

"A FROWSY GRAY HEAD AND A BONY HAND, CLUTCHING A REVOLVER, STRETCHED OUT OF THE OPENING."

"Hello!" Tom cried. "Call off your dog; we're friends."

Then a tousled, ragged, gaunt-limbed figure, emaciated with hunger, wild eyed with fever, dragged itself from the sheltering brush, gave one long look at the stalwart strangers, and fell back on the stony ground in a dead faint, while the dog, rushing forward with the courage of a starved wolf, planted himself before the corpse-like form and defied them to touch it.

They fought off the animal, brought water from the lake and revived the man. A dram from Tom's flask stimulated him, whereupon he sat up and began to chatter incoherently, thanks to God and wild exclamations about some hidden treasure mingling with such plaintive cries as "She'll be all right now!" and "Mebbe she'll forgive her old dad!" making up the whole of his ceaseless talk.

"He's clean crazy!" was Cooper's opinion.

"Yes," Tom assented, "but it is fever and famine. Couldn't you shoot a rabbit or something? Then I could make him a stew. Try it."

But all that Cooper could quickly find to kill were three mountain jays, which were converted into a broth, thickened with the dust of flour that remained. A little tea was also found in the sick man's pack, and this was brewed for him. Then Cooper volunteered to go back to their own camp and bring over more food and Tom's little medicine case.

The next day he fetched the rest of their luggage, and in the afternoon shot a deer. So they encamped here beside the lake and nursed the old fellow until his fever subsided and the delirium had ceased to a great extent. Then by easy stages, partly carrying him on a stretcher, partly assisting him to walk, they managed to take him back to Crimson Camp and gave him a bed in Tom's cabin.

But the strain of this effort had been too much for the aged and feeble frame. No sooner was the excitement of the march at an end than a relapse occurred, and for a fortnight the old man hovered on the edge of death; skill and care seemed to conquer, however, and one morning peace came to the tortured brain and the old prospector began to get better.

Now at last he was awake, with seeming intelligence in his eyes, asking where he was and who were the people around him. Tom explained and then questioned him in return.

But the mystery was not to be so easily solved. The invalid could not tell his name, nor where he had come from. He said he had been prospecting all his life—where—how long—all particulars were a blank.

"I can't remember anything but the cache—nothing else at all," he declared, gazing piteously into one face after another.

"Tell us about that, then."

He felt in his bosom and drew out the little pouch. It was opened for him and its contents—a fragment of quartz heavy with gold and a tiny steel key—taken out.

"Ah! What do you call that?" he inquired eagerly, pointing to the yellow metal.

"Gold."

"Yes? Well, there is lots of that in my cache."

"Where is your cache?" inquired Tom.

The old fellow dropped his head and tried to think, but couldn't clutch any of the motes of memory dodging like phantasmagoria before his eyes.

"I can't tell," he confessed, with infinite sadness. "I reckon I'd know the place if I saw it. And I've forgotten everything before that, but it seems to me that I fell a great ways, and lay for years and years with an awful pain in my head. Then all at once my head got better and I opened my eyes—mebbe it was a dream—and there I and the dog were in a little camp 'way up a big gulch. I knew the place, but I felt kind o' weak and dizzy-like and 'lowed I'd make a cache o' all my stuff, and go down to Del Nort' and see a doctor. So I dug a hole beside a big rock that had a peculiar mark on it, and put into it most o' my grub and some papers, and a lot o' that yellow stuff—what d'ye call it?—and reckoned they'd be safe till I come back in three or four weeks. I can remember all about the cache and my camp there, and my leavin' it and climbin' down a devilish steep place, and there I stop and can't remember nothin' since."

This was absolutely all that was left of the man's memory, and, though he was now quite sane, he had to be taught the names and uses of many of the commonest objects. Moreover, he seemed to grow weaker instead of stronger, and after a few days the physician announced that his patient's end was near. When the old fellow was told this he called Tom to his bedside, and said to him:

"Pardner, you've done the square thing by me, and I want you to have half the traps in that cache after I've

passed in my checks, and give the other half to—to—oh, God! Now I can't remember!”

Then his face brightened again.

“Oh, the letters'll tell! Read the letters and give her half of it. I'll sign a paper if you'll write it.”

So a will was made, and the dying man made a mark before witness, in lieu of the signature he had lost the power to make, and the next day he died.

The miners generally believed the stranger's story of this cache to be a figment of his disordered imagination, and Tom himself might have yielded to this theory had not the physician assured him that there was a fair chance of its truth.

So Tom preserved the will, the quartz and the key, hoping that chance might sometime disclose the treasure trove if there were any; and a few days later he and young Cooper started a second time on their prospecting tour. This time they took a burro with them, and so were able to carry a small tent and outfit for a fortnight's trip.

By active marching they reached the lake that night, finding it slow work to get their unwilling donkey up the steep rocks at the fall, by a circuitous trail and aided by some actual lifting of the little beast. They researched the hut, but found nothing new. The dog, now fat and strong, and a devoted friend, accompanied them and betrayed most excitedly his recognition of the bivouac. Next morning they made their way up to the head of the lake, where the breadth of the gulch and the appearance of things confirmed Tom's previous surmise that this was originally the main channel of drainage.

If this were true they ought to get evidence of drift gold; and several days were spent in panning the gravels (nowhere, however, of great extent), with most encouraging results. A few miles above the lake they found the gulch forked into two ravines divided by a rocky spur. They chose the right-hand one and lost three days in fruitless exploration of its bed and walls. Shep (the dog was a collie and they had rechristened him) did not display anything like the joy he had shown in the advance up the main stream, and when they finally returned to the forks they could not but notice his renewed spirits. The dog was again all eagerness, and intensely delighted when on the following morning they started up the left-hand gulch.

“It looks as though his master had come down that way, doesn't it?” said Tom. “Maybe he could guide us right back to where he came from; but he'll have to wait a while, for I like the look of that crag up there,” directing his companion's attention to the crest of the wall on the left, “and I want to examine it. You'd better stay here and try to get a blacktail. Bacon three times a day is getting monotonous.”

“Don't you think you'd better take the Winchester?” said Cooper. (They had brought but one rifle.) “You might hit up against a grizzly or a mountain lion. I heard one of 'em screeching last night.”

“No; I can't lug a gun. I've got my six shooter, and I'll risk it. Come on, Shep! It's noon now, and we won't get back to supper if we don't hurry.”

The dog raced gleefully ahead as the young man strode up the gulch, scanning its rugged slope in search of a convenient place to begin the ascent, and presently, as though cognizant of the plan, the dog turned aside and with loud barking and much tail wagging invited attention to a dry watercourse that offered a sort of path.

“I guess you're right, Shep,” Tom assented, and set his face to the sturdy climb.

Half way up a ledge, covered with cedars and Spanish bayonet, made the ascent really arduous for a little way, and here the dog, which as usual was some rods in advance, suddenly began barking furiously, and capering around a small object.

“Chipmunk, I reckon,” said Tom to himself, as he scrambled on, short of breath; but when Shep came sliding down, holding in his mouth a battered old felt hat, curiosity changed to amazement. The dog growled at first, and refused to give up his prize, but after a little coaxing yielded it into Tom's hands.

The old prospector had had no hat when found. Could this be it? It did not seem to have lain out of doors long, and the dog would hardly show so much interest unless his sharp nose had recognized it as something belonging to his former inaster. Closely scrutinizing, Tom found tucked into the lining a slip of sweat-stained paper with a name upon it—

ARTHUR F. PIERSON,

Tucsony Arizona.

Stuffing the hat into his pocket Tom scrambled on, thinking out the meaning of the incident; and now he began to notice in this steeper place that some of the boulders had been misplaced, and here and there was a broken branch, as, if someone had descended very hastily or clumsily.

“If that crazy old man came down here, and perhaps caught a second bad fall, I don't wonder he was used up by the time he reached the lake” was Tom's mental ejaculation, as he toiled up the acclivity and at last, panting and leg weary, gained a narrow grassy level at the foot of a crag “spiked with firs,” which had been conspicuous from the valley not only by its height and castellated battlements, but because a colossal X was formed on its face by two broad veins of quartz crossing each other.

With his eyes fixed upon the rocky wall he walked along in the face of a stiff breeze, until he noticed a pinkish streak upon the dark cliff, betokening the outcrop of another vein, and turned aside to climb a pile of fallen fragments at the foot of the crag to reach it. These fragments were overgrown with low, dense shrubbery. He ducked his head and was pushing into them, when suddenly he saw a huge brown body rise almost into his face, heard the tremendous growl of a grizzly, and amid a crash of bushes and dislodged stones felt himself hurled backward.

Clutching instinctively at one of the shrubs as he fell, he whirled under its hiding foliage, and the vicious stroke of the bear's paw came down upon his leg instead of his head, while the released branches snapped upward into the face of the brute, which, as much surprised as its victim, paused in its onslaught to collect its wits. An instant later Shep dashed up, and at the bear's hindquarters. Bruin spasmodically sank his claws

deeper into Tom's thigh, but turned his head and shoulders with a terrific ursine oath at this new and most palpable enemy; and ten seconds afterward Tom's revolver, its muzzle pressed close underneath the bear's ear, had emptied half an ounce of lead into its brain. A blood-freezing death squeal tore the air, and the ponderous carcass sank down, stone dead, upon Tom's body and upon the dwarfed spruce which covered it. It pinned him to the ground with an almost insupportable weight. Perhaps if the animal alone had lain upon him he might have wriggled out; but the brute's carcass also held down the tough and firmly-rooted tree, and the rocks on each side formed a sort of trough. Turn and strain as he would Tom could not free himself from the burden which threatened to smother him. Moreover, the convulsive death throe had forcibly tightened the grip of the claws in the side of his knee, which felt as if in some horrible torturing machine of the Inquisition; and had he not been able at last to reach that paw with his left hand and pull it away from the wound he would have died under the agony.

Then, as he felt the blood running hot and copious down his leg, a new fear chilled his heart. Might he not bleed to death? There seemed no end to the hemorrhage, and what hope had he of succor? He thought of firing signals of distress, but could not reach the pistol, which had been knocked out of his hand. He spoke to the dog, which was barking and worrying at the bear's hind leg, and Shep came and licked his face and sniffed at his blood-soaked trousers. Then, as if even he realized how hopeless was the situation, he sat on his haunches and howled until Tom, hearing him less and less distinctly, imagined himself a boulder slowly but musically crunching to powder under the resistless advance of a glacier, and lost consciousness as the cold-blue dream-ice closed over his dust.

By and by he awoke. It was dark, and something cold and soft was blowing against his face. He moved and felt the shaggy fur and the horrible pain in his leg and in his right arm, which was confined in a twisted position. Then he remembered, but forgot again.

A second time he awoke. It was still dark, but a strange pallor permeated the air, and all around him was a mist of white.

It was snowing fast. He closed his left hand and grasped a whole fistful of flakes. The body of the bear was a mound of white—like a new-made grave over him, he dismally thought. The snow had drifted under and about his shoulders. Its chill struck the wound in his thigh, which throbbed as though hit with pointed hammers, keeping time to the pulsations of his heart; but, thank God! he no longer felt that horrible warm trickling down his leg. He had been preserved from bleeding to freeze to death. How long before that would happen; or, if it were not cold enough for that, how long before the snow would drift clear over him and cut off the little breath which that ponderous, inert, dead-cold beast on his chest prevented from entering his lungs? Where was the dog? He called feebly: “Shep! Shep! Hi-i-i, Sh-e-p!” But no moist nose or rough tongue responded. He tried to whistle, but his parched mouth refused. Heavens, how thirsty! He stretched out his hand and gathered the snow within his reach. Then he closed his eyes and dreamed that two giants were pulling him asunder, and that a third was pouring molten lead down his throat.

But it was only Bill Cooper trying to make him drink whiskey.

He understood it after a little and realized that he ought to swallow. Then life came back, and with the knowledge that he was no longer alone on the cold, remote, relentless mountain top, but that Cooper was lifting away the bear, and that Shep was wild with sympathy and gladness because he had been able to bring help, came courage and forbearance of his suffering. In the morning new strength came with the sunshine. The snow rapidly melted. Cooper got breakfast and Tom rebandaged his knee.

“These gashes won't amount to much, unless the claws were poisoned. You'll have to make me a crutch, and give me a couple of days to get rid of the stiffness, but then I'll be all right.”

“How did you and the bear get into this scrimmage, anyhow? You surely didn't go hunting him with that there six shooter?”

“Not I. The wind was blowing hard toward me, so he didn't smell nor hear me, and I ran right on to him. Shep was not there to warn me, but if he hadn't come back just as he did, or if I hadn't been able to get at my revolver, Old Ephraim would ha' used me up in about a minute.”

“I ain't a betting on one pistol shot against a grizzly, anyhow.”

“Of course, the chances were about one in a thousand, but I wasn't going to die without a shot. I suppose the bullet struck the lower part of the brain.”

“Yes,” said Bill, who had been probing its track. “Tore it all to pieces. But what was the bear after in that brush?”

“Give it up—ants, likely. You know—Great Scott! What's that dog got now?” Shep was coming out of the bushes, dragging a package wrapped in buckskin which was almost too heavy for him to handle. Cooper went and took it from him and brought it to the fire. It was a sort of pouch firmly tied with a thong. Running a knife under this the bundle fell apart, and a double handful of flakes and nuggets of gold and quartz rolled out.

“The cache!” Tom shouted, comprehending instantly the meaning of this. “The bear was tearing it to pieces!”

It was true. His strong feet had displaced the loosely-heaped stones, and a half-devoured side of bacon lay close by where the animal had been disturbed.

Evidently the marauder had just begun his work. There remained in the cache two more pouches of gold—perhaps a quart of the metal pieces in all, more or less pure, for all of it had been dug out of a vein with hammer and knife point, none of the fragments showing the water-worn roundness characteristic of placer gold. Then there were a small quantity of provisions, some ammunition and a small rosewood box with an ornamental brass lock having a remarkably small and irregular keyhole.

From an inner pocket of his purse Tom drew the odd little key the dead prospector had given him. It fitted into the hole and easily turned the lock. The cover sprang open, revealing a package of letters. He lifted them out, but did not pause to read them.

Then came an envelope containing a patent to ranch lands in Arizona, certificates of stock in Mexican and other mines that Burke had never heard of, and a commission as lieutenant of artillery in the Confederate

army. All these documents were made out to “Arthur F. Pierson,” establishing the fact that the lost hat was really that worn by the old man, as his dog had recognized.

At the bottom of the box, however, Tom found what interested him most—a formal “claim” and description of the lode whence the gold had been taken, and how to reach it from this cache. It was written in pencil, in a very shaky hand, on two or three soiled leaves torn from a memorandum book and eked out with one of the covers.

Then Tom took up the letters. Most of them were recent and of business importance, but several were old and worn with much handling. One of these latter was from a lawyer in San Francisco, acknowledging funds “sent for the support of your infant daughter,” describing her health and growth, and the care taken of her “at the convent”—all in curt business phrase, but precious to the father's heart. Then there were two or three small letters, printed and scratched in a childish hand, to “dear, dear papa,” and signed “Your little Polly.” One of these spoke of Sister Agatha and Sister Theresa, showing that it was written while the child was still in the convent; but the others, a little later, prattled about a new home with “my new papa and mamma,” but gave no clew to name or place.

“This baby girl—she must be a young woman now, if she lives,” Tom mused—“is evidently the person the poor old chap wanted me to divide with. It ought not to be difficult to trace her from San Francisco, I suppose the convent Sisters knew where she went to when they gave her up. But, hello! here's a picture.”

It was an old-fashioned daguerrotype of a handsome woman of perhaps four-and-twenty, in bridal finery, whose face seemed to him to have something familiar in its expression. But no name or date was to be found, and with the natural conclusion that this was probably Pierson's wife he puzzled a moment more over the pretty face, and then put it away.

After a few days, when Burke was able to travel, the prospector's memorandum and their mountain craft together led them almost directly to the coveted gold vein, which ran across a shoulder of the mountain at the head of the gulch, like an obscure trail, finally disappearing under a great talus at the foot of a line of snowcapped crags.

Tracing it along, they presently came upon the old man's claim marks. The stakes were lettered pathetically with the name of the old man's choosing—“Polly's Hope.”

Adjoining the “Hope” Tom staked out one claim for himself and another for his sweetheart, intending to do the proper assessment work on it himself if Corbitt couldn't or wouldn't; and Cooper used up most of what remained of the visible outcrop in a claim for himself.

Returning to town their claims were registered in the Crimson Mineral District, and their report sent a flight of gold hunters in hot haste to the scene.

Tom Burke, after selling everything he could send to market to turn into ready money, departed to Denver, carrying with him documents and specimens of the gold quartz to support his assertions.

Keen men fêted and flattered him, buttonholing him at every corner with whispered advice, and many proffered schemes. But he was indifferent to it all, and anxious as yet only to hear what Marion should say.

Not a word had he heard from her directly during all the weeks of her absence, but indirectly he knew she had been a star in the local society. He had even to hunt out where she lived, finding it in a cottage near where the stately court house now stands.

He went there, after tea, with a fastbeating heart. Had she forgotten, or withdrawn or been turned away by hardhearted parents and friends? He suspected everything and everybody, yet could give no reasons. And how absurd these fears looked to him—how *foolish!*—when, sitting in the little parlor, hand in hand, they talked over the past, and she confided that the same doubts had worried her now and then—“most of all, Tom, dear, when I hear of this wonderful success of yours.”

“Bless me! I had forgotten it. By your side all else——”

Here the door opened—not too abruptly—and Mr. Corbitt came in, grimly hospitable and glad, no doubt for his own sake, to see this young fellow who was still true to his daughter; while Mrs. Corbitt was more openly cordial, as became her.

“An' what's this we're hearin' aboot your new mines? They're sayin' down town that you've struck a regular bonanza, an'll soon be worth your meellions. But I told 'em 'Hoot! I'd heard the like o' that before!'”

So Tom recounted briefly the story of the prospector's death and his will; still more briefly his adventure with the grizzly, and how it led to the curious disclosure of the cache. Then, with no little dramatic force, seeing how interested was his audience, he described the hunt for the vein and the finding it, produced his specimens and handed to Miss Marion a mass of almost solid gold embedded in its matrix.

“I can't promise you,” he said, as she tried to thank him with her eyes and a timid touch of her fingers, “that the whole ledge will equal that, but it is a genuine sample from near the surface.”

“Wonderful! Wonderful!” the old Scotchman ejaculated, with gleaming eyes, as Tom went on to show how regular and secure was the title to this possession. “But did ye no find out the name of the poor vagabone?”

“Oh, yes. Didn't I mention it? His name was Arthur Pierson.”

Corbitt and his wife both started from their seats.

“Man, did I hear ye aright?—*Arthur F. Pierson?*”

“That was the name exactly. I can show it to you on the letters.”

“An' he charged ye to give the half of all ye found to his daughter Polly?”

“Yes, and I mean to try to find her.”

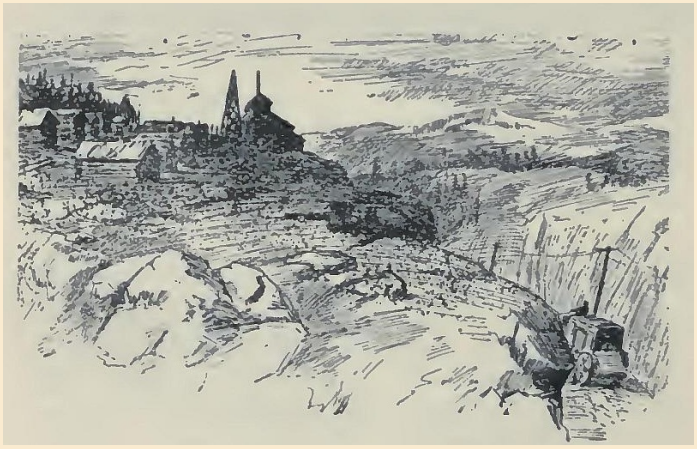
“*There she sits!*” cried Mother Corbitt excitedly, before her cautious husband, could say “Hush!”—pointing at Marion, who gazed from one to the other, too much amazed to feel grieved yet at this stunning announcement. “We took the lassie when she was a wee bairn, and she would never ha' known she wasn't ours really till maybe we were dead and gone. Her feyther was a cankert, fashious body, but her mother was guid and bonnie (I knew her well in the auld country) and she died when Mary—that's you, my dearie—was

born.”

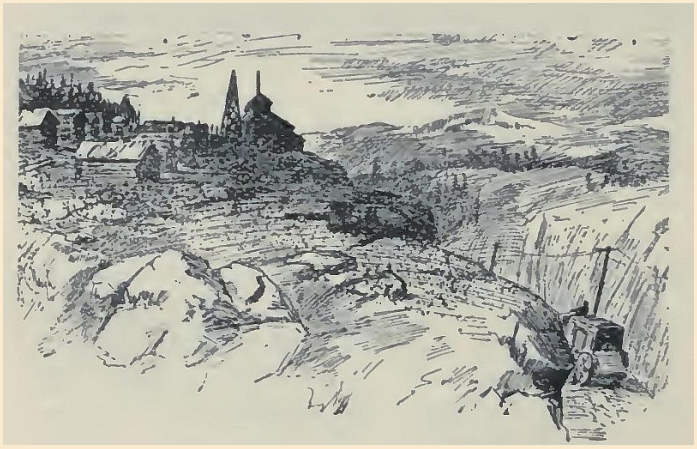
“Is this her picture?” Tom asked, showing the daguerrotype.

“Aye, that it is. Puir Jennie!”

The rest is soon told. A company of capitalists was formed to work the four consolidated claims on the new vein, under the name of the Hope Mining Company.



All the next season was spent by Tom Burke in developing the property and erecting machinery. Corbitt was there too, much thawed by the sun of prosperity, but his wife and daughter remained in Denver. In the autumn, however, the ladies went East, and as the holidays approached Tom and Corbitt followed them to New York, where, on Christmas eve, my hero and heroine were married quietly in a little church up town; and his gift to her was the brooch which had attracted my attention and whose significance was now plain.



Mitchell

IN the heart of Wales, nestling between two dark frowning mountains, and lulled to drowsy indifference of the big outside world by the murmurs of the not far distant sea, stands the little village of Cod-y-glyn.

Just outside the village, on the main road stands—or did stand ten years ago—an old stone house, in the middle of a large garden, which was surrounded on all sides by a high wall, also of stone. It was the pride of the owner, Miss Gwynne.

One night, in the early spring of the year, there was to be a wedding at Cod-y-Glyn—a wedding in humble life, but anticipated with great glee by the invited guests, among whom were Miss Gwynne's servants, the coachman and his wife (who was also cook) and Ylva, their daughter, employed as a maid-of-all-work.

Knowing the disappointment it would be to them if they were denied the pleasure of attending the wedding, she had declined the coachman's offer to remain with her, allowing his wife and daughter to go, and laughingly assured him that with her father's gun for company she feared nothing.

Miss Gwynne retired at an early hour, having locked up the house.

She lay for some time gazing through the window at the twinkling stars, lost in quiet retrospection.

I will let Miss Gwynne tell the rest of the story in her own way, repeating as well as I can from memory the words as I heard them from her lips ten years ago.

I cannot tell if I dozed or not, but I was conscious of the moon shining dimly through the clouds, and I wondered how long I had lain there. Reaching out for my watch, which lay on the table, I was horrified to feel my wrist grasped and held by a firm hand.

To say I was frightened would be less correct than to say I was astounded, for I have always been a woman of steady nerve, and the present occasion called for its use.

The moon had retired behind a heavy curtain of clouds, and the room was in complete darkness, but from the drapery at my bedside issued a voice, and at the same time the python-like grasp on my wrist relaxed.

“I beg to apologize, madam,” said this voice; “I have chosen a bungling manner of awakening you—foreign to my custom. Pardon me, and do not be alarmed. I merely wish to relieve you of any superfluous silver, jewelry or bank notes you do not absolutely need. But as the vandalism of breaking locks is out of my line, I will request you to arise and show me where such things are kept.”

By the time he had finished this speech I was myself again.

“Very well,” I said, “I'll get up and show you; but, as it is embarrassing to dress in your presence, will you step out into the hall and close the door while I put on my clothing?”

There was a soft rustling of the curtains at the bedside, and the sound of footsteps on the carpet, and immediately afterward the door closed.

“Five minutes, madam, is all I can give you,” remarked the burglar, as he disappeared.

It took me (after lighting the candle) two minutes to slip on a warm skirt, and a blue flannel wrapper over it; then, sticking my feet into a pair of down slippers, I had still time to snatch a roll of bills amounting to one hundred pounds, and pin them deftly to the lining of the canopy above my four-post bed.

Then throwing open the door I stood on the sill facing my visitor, and threw the glare of the lighted candle full upon him, as he lolled in a careless, easy attitude against the bannisters.

I had been prepared for a burglar—but I had looked for one attired according to the traditions of my ancestors. But here was a gentlemanly, mild-featured individual, such as I should have expected to find filling the position of a professor of Latin—perhaps of theology—in Oxford University.

There was no appearance of a jimmy, or tools of any kind. Evidently here was a type of criminal with which history was unacquainted.

“Madam!” he exclaimed, bowing with the grace of a French courtier, “you are punctuality itself. And how charming!—no hysterics—no distressing scenes. Allow me.” He took the candle from my hand, and holding it aloft preceded me down the great oaken stairs, talking fluently all the while, but pausing at every other step to glance over his shoulder at me with coquettish politeness.

“I wish to assure you,” he remarked, “that I am no ordinary house-breaker. Burglary is with me a *profession*, though not the one (I confess) chosen for me by my parents. I saw, at an early age, that I must either descend to the level of the burglar, or raise him to the level of an artist. Behold, my dear lady, the result.”

He stood at the foot of the stairs and looked up at me.

“Shall we proceed to the diningroom?” he asked airily; “and, as I wish to give you no unnecessary trouble, let me say that I do not dabble in *plated* spoons; nothing but solid silver.”

I opened the old mahogany sideboard, in which Griffiths had, for years, placed the family heirlooms at night, and beheld my gentlemanly burglar stow them, one after another, in a capacious felt sack, which he carried in his hand.

“Charming!” he cried. “I am a connoisseur, I assure you, and I know silver from plate. These articles are really worth the risk of the enterprise.”

You ask me if I was not alarmed. No, I was *not*. Personal violence was not in his professional line, unless opposed. I summoned all my energies to outwit him. I thought much and said little, for I had no intention of allowing him to carry off my mother's silver.

After having rifled all the rooms of the most valuable articles, he returned to the dining-room.

On the table the remains of supper still stood, consisting of a fowl, hardly touched, some delicately cut bread and butter, cake, and a glass jar containing some fancy crackers.

“I will make myself entirely at home,” he remarked, sitting down to the table, and helping himself to a wing of the chicken.

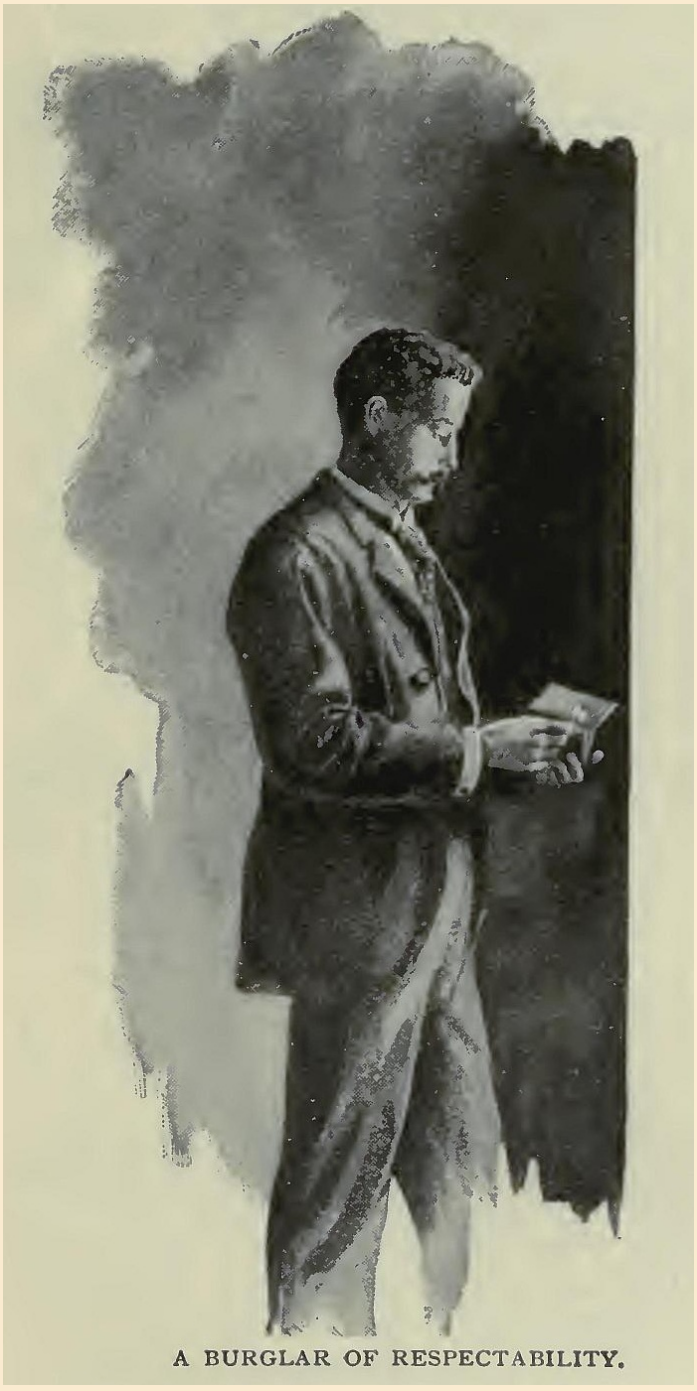
“Really,” he proceeded, “I have thoroughly enjoyed this evening. Not only have I met a most charming lady, but I have been able to prove to her that the terms gentleman and burglar may be synonomous.”

He now began on the cake. I pushed the cracker jar toward him. “Try them,” I observed.

Still smiling indulgently, and talking, he took out one of the crackers and began to nibble on it. It was *very dry*.

I rose, and in an absent-minded manner placed on the table the remains of a bottle of rare old Burgundy, which had been opened the day before.

“Now, really,” he prattled, “I'm a very harmless man five months out of six—I never steal unless other means fail, or a tailor's bill comes due. I'm a respectable citizen and—a church member in good standing when I'm not on one of my professional tours. I took up burglary more as a resource than from necessity. Candidly speaking, now, *am* I a ruffian?”



A BURGLAR OF RESPECTABILITY.

“No!” I replied, looking directly at him. “On the contrary, you are a very fine-looking man.”

A glow of vanity spread over his face. I poured out a glass of the Burgundy and pushed it toward him.

“England to Wales!” he cried with gallantry. “I don't generally drink,” he added, “but these crackers make

me thirsty."

"If I could only find a wife suited to my tastes," he mused, "such a woman as *you* are, by George! I'd give up aesthetic burglary and settle down to quiet domestic bliss." He looked questioningly at me. "If"—he hesitated—"you could be sure I would abandon my profession—would you—do you think you could—condone my past and—marry me?"

"That is a matter for consideration," I replied.

He helped himself to another cracker.

"Your proposal is so startlingly unique," I continued, "to marry one's burglar! Really it is quite a joke."

"Isn't it?" he chuckled, evidently enjoying the idea of the oddity. "We are kindred spirits!" he exclaimed, convivially, but was interrupted by a violent fit of coughing.

Seizing the bottle of Burgundy, he drained the only drop or two left.

"I think, maybe, there's another bottle down in the cellar," I cried, artlessly. "I'll go down and see—I feel thirsty myself."

"We will descend together," exclaimed my burglar, gallantly taking the candle from my hand and following me to the door leading to the cellar steps.

We descended the steps chatting pleasantly—he discoursing on matrimony, I answering rather vaguely, but measuring the distance to the wine bins by my eye. They were at the far end of the cellar, and were five in number, each large enough to hold a quarter of a ton of coal. Before the furthest one I paused.

"HERE," I SAID, "IS THE BRAND WE ARE LOOKING FOR."

"Here," I said, "is the brand we are looking for." I raised the heavy lid and looked in. "I will hold the candle," I observed; "will you get the bottle? I can hardly reach it."

He handed me the candle and bent low over the bin. Ha! ha! Quicker than a flash of lightning I tipped up his heels (he was easily overbalanced), and into the bin he fell headlong. Down came the heavy lid. But there was no padlock on it. I must hurry! Blowing out the candle, I ran, for I knew the way, straight to the cellar steps and up them—like a cat. Then with a locked door between myself and my burglar, I could breathe.

I heard the man kicking about down below, for of course he got out of the bin at once. But our cellar is a labyrinth. Seizing father's old gun from its resting-place in the hall, I sat down near the door at the head of the stairs, waiting for the worst.

The door was fairly strong—that I knew; but he was a powerful man. So I dragged a heavy table from the sitting-room and placed it against it.

Suddenly I became conscious that he had found his way to the stairs and was rapidly approaching the door, which was all that lay between me and his revengeful fury.

Bracing myself against the opposite wall, I raised the old gun, and, deliberately aiming it, waited.

He began by pounding with both fists on the door, but, not receiving any answer, he tried threats. An instinct seemed to tell him I would remain on guard.

His language, I must confess, while threatening, was not abusive. It was, in fact, incredibly elegant for a burglar, and strictly grammatical.

All at once there came a crash, followed by the creaking of heavy timber, and the door fell. Down he came on top of it, sprawling at my feet on the floor. I raised my gun and fired.

“Hit him?” I interrupted.

“No,” replied Miss Gwynne; “here in the wall of the dining-room the bullet lodged, and is still there.”

The next thing I was conscious of was Mrs. Griffiths bending over me, and her husband's voice exclaiming:

“He'd never have escaped if we had not left that door open when we came in. You see we got home just in time to hear you fire the gun, and as we ran in he ran out. Drat him!”

I raised myself on my elbow and looked eagerly about.

“He had no time to carry off a thing,” said Mrs. Griffiths.

“I would like to set my eyes on him,” I remarked, when Miss Gwynne had concluded her story. “You are a distinguished woman and are—I believe—the very first one who ever received an offer of marriage from a burglar.”

The lady smiled. “Do you not remember reading about the capture of a notorious bank robber, several years ago? The case created quite a sensation, owing partly to the difficulty in tracing the thief, who was clever enough to puzzle the most expert detectives and evade the police, and also to the respectability of his position. No one could believe him guilty.”

“Indeed I do remember it,” I answered. “Not only that, but I *saw* the man after he was in prison. I happened to be going through Chester Jail at the time and J——— was pointed out to me. He was quite distinguished looking. In fact, I did not believe him guilty.”

“Nor would I,” said Miss Gwynne, “if I had not known.”

“You mean,” I said, “that he——

“I mean that you saw *my burglar*.”

THE LADY IN ROUGE, By W. E. P. French

“Pretty woman! That's just like a man. Pretty chromo, you mean, Tom.”

“Well,” in a hearty, pleasant voice, “maybe you are the better judge; but I don't believe she's 'made up,' and if I wasn't the most henpecked man on earth I'd say she was the loveliest creature I ever saw. As for her hair,

it's——”

“Blondined! And so utterly impossible in color that it couldn't for a moment fool anybody but a man,” interrupted the first speaker, with deliciously spiteful emphasis on the very common noun man.

“Eyebrows stencilled, eyelashes darkened; lips, ears and finger tips tinged with carmine—don't you know? Complexion enamel, vinegar rouge and brunette powder—pshaw! The way the men go on about her makes me positively ill. If you fall in love with her, Harry, you are no brother of mine. I don't care to be sister-in-law to a lithograph in *fast* colors.”

“You make me curious to see her, Nell, dear. By Jove, she must be either a monster or a paragon! Have the spirit of a man, Tom, and tell me which.”

“Don't try to extract any more information from me, old man; my teeth are positively chattering with terror. You can decide for yourself this evening, if your ferocious sister will allow you to leave your room. By the way,” with an amused laugh, “what do you suppose Nell and the rest of her charitable sex up here have dubbed the poor girl? 'The lady in rouge!'”

“Yes, and she ought to have a sign, 'Paint, don't touch.' I believe she is a divorcée or a widow, and I know she's thirty in spite of her sickening affectation of youth.”

“Oh, come, Nell, you are absolutely vicious. She is not a day over twenty, and she has the prettiest name I ever heard, Violante Solander; accent on the second syllable, Harry, not on the first, to rhyme with Hollander, as the bride of my bosom insists on pronouncing it.”

“Sounds like a combination of Spanish and Scandinavian,” the younger man answers.

“It is,” returns his brother-in-law. “I have met her father several times at the Cosmos Club in Washington. He is a Norwegian, a wonderfully handsome man, of the purest blonde type, with charming old-time manners and a voice as deep and sonorous as a fine bell. Jack Kendricks, who knows him quite well, told me something of his history. As a young man he traveled pretty much all over the world, and in South America met and married Miss Viola's mother. She was an Ecuadorean of Spanish descent, and so beautiful that she was called, in reference to her name, which was the same as her daughter's, 'The Violet of Quito.' It is really a case of the Arctic zone wedding the Equator.”

“Or of a walrus committing matrimony with a llama. No wonder she is neither fish, flesh nor fowl,” added madame, with a malicious emphasis that made both men laugh.

This conversation floated up to me as I sat smoking my cigar on the forward edge of the hurricane deck of the little steamer that carried passengers from the railroad station at the foot of a beautiful and well-known lake in the Adirondacks to the village at the head of it, whither we were all bound.

The party of three had crossed from the other side of the boat and Were leaning against the guards immediately under me. Later on I came to know them all well. The lady was a delightful little bundle of inconsistencies, sharp of tongue, quick of temper and jealous of all that belonged to her, but as generous as an Arab, very warm hearted, perfectly fearless and honest and a loyal friend when won. She was born Miss Eleanor Van Zandt, a family with a tree and traditions, pride, possessions and position; but the fact that she belonged in the top layer of the Four Hundred did not prevent her, some ten years before, refusing a scion of the English nobility (a very wealthy one, too, if you'll believe me), to her mother's Infinite disgust, and giving her dimpled little hand, where she had already given her heart, to big, kindly, genial Thomas Northrup, who was every inch a man and a gentleman, but who was third in direct descent (and gloried in it, too) from old John Northrup, saddle and harness maker, of whom I have heard it told by one that saw it that he died on his sixtieth birthday in the battle of Gettysburg, from some twenty bullet wounds received while carrying the colors of his regiment, and that his last words were: “Don't let the Johnnies get the flag!”

I feel it to be my painful duty to relate that Madame Nell, when remonstrated with by her family upon the plebeian nature of the match she was about to make, flew into a violent rage and said she would gladly trade a baker's dozen of her eminently high and wellborn Knickerbocker ancestors for “that grand old saddler.” The Van Zandt crest is a lion rampant gardant, and shortly after the wedding an aunt, who had declined to be present, received a spirited sketch of the family beast, leaning upon a musket in the position of parade rest, carrying a flag in his mouth and bearing upon his lordly back a monstrous saddle, the motto in the surrounding heraldic belt being, “Don't let the Johnnies get the flag!” This cheerful device was accompanied by a very deferential and affectionate note from the bride, asking her aunt if she did not think it a pretty way of combining the Northrup family (saddle) tree with the crest of the Van Zandts, or if she thought the “dear old lion” would appear to better advantage under a saddle that would conceal him entirely from the gaze of the vulgar herd.

The old lady declined to receive Mrs. Northrup from that time until the day of her death, about four years later, but when her will was opened it was found that she had left $200,000 to her niece, Eleanor Van Zandt, “as a mark of respect for her truth, courage and *artistic ability*,” and $10,000 for a monument “to that gallant soldier and true gentleman, John Northrup, who died on the field of Gettysburg in the defense of his country's flag.” Nell designed the monument, and every Decoration Day she puts a saddle made of flowers on the old lady's grave. But to my tale.

Harry Van Zandt, at the time of which I write, was about twenty-six, tall, broad shouldered, athletic, brown as to eyes, hair, skin and pointed beard, an engineer and architect by profession, an advanced and liberal thinker for so young a man, full of high spirits, though with a depth and earnestness of purpose very refreshing in these days when selfish indifference is the rule, and altogether a manly, honorable, self reliant and energetic young fellow. He had charming manners, reverenced all women, rich or poor, proud or humble, and treated old people with an affectionate deference that won him many friends.

The steamer had changed her course to the left rather sharply, heading for her wharf, when a Long Lake boat, with a woman at the sculls and a young man holding the tiller ropes, crossed our bow and floated by

within fifteen feet of us. I did not need the quick, “There she is! Look, Harry!” from Mr. Northrup to know that it was Miss Solander. She had turned her head slightly toward them to bow, and the setting sun shone squarely in her face, making the wonderful amber hair seem a nimbus of golden light against the dark background of her huge Gainsborough hat.

A more perfectly, harmoniously, radiantly beautiful girl I have never seen. Her coloring was simply marvelous, and I inclined to Mrs. Northrup's opinion that it must be artificial. It is impossible to give an adequate description of her—the wonderful child-woman. A face of rounded and exquisite contours, the skin of that warmest, richest, brunette type that is almost dusky; cheeks that had the soft, tender, velvety bloom of a sun-kissed peach; a charming mouth, scarlet as a flower, ripe, luscious, sensitive, ready to curve with sweet, swift laughter or to droop with grief. Her eyes, in the glimpse I had of her, I took to be black or a very dark brown, but later I found they were of that rare deep blue that becomes violet by an artificial light, and, indeed, owing to the length and thickness of the dark lashes, it was not easy at any time to determine their exact color, much less shade. Well, she was more nearly perfect than any other human thing I ever hope to see.

From her gold-flax curls' most marvelous shine,
Down to her lithe and delicate feet,
There was not a curve nor a waving line
But moved in a harmony firm and sweet.

As she passed from view I looked down at the trio below me. Mrs. Northrup was regarding her brother curiously, and I don't think either she or I was at all surprised when he turned, his face aglow with enthusiasm, and said: “What a lovely girl!” Then, with quick change of tone, “Who is that man with her?”

“Lovely as a Prang,” remarked my lady, dryly. “The man is your hated rival, of whom you are already madly jealous. He is young, beautiful and rich, dances divinely, speaks *real* English and has very nearly a tablespoonful of brains—not that he needs such a preponderance of brain, for he has enough money to make a social success of a jibbering idiot. His name is Francis Floyd-Jones, but we speak of him affectionately as 'Fluggeon,' and those that know him best sometimes lovingly refer to him as 'Balaam's Ass'—but you'll like him, Harry.”

Van Zandt's reply I did not hear, as I discreetly moved away; but I heard both men laugh, and I joined them heartily when at a safe distance.

When we landed I found we were all bound for the same hotel, a capital one, named for and kept by one of a famous hotel-keeping family. The Northrups' little girl, a madcap child of six, was on the lawn waiting the return of her parents and the arrival of her uncle, of whom she was evidently very fond, although she abandoned him speedily in order to hug and kiss his superb Irish setter, Blarney, who licked the small imp's face calmly and appeared in his grave dog's way genuinely glad to see her.

Ethel, as I found out in a day or two, had taken one of those intense fancies that children do occasionally to almost entire strangers to “the lady in rouge,” and would escape to her whenever chance permitted. Poor Mrs. Northrup! Her ranks were deserters to the enemy. Her husband openly admired the gorgeously-tinted girl, her child simply worshipped her, her brother had palpably fallen in love at first sight, and, when we came out from dinner, it was found that Blarney had dumbly sworn allegiance to the violet of two zones and could with difficulty be induced to leave her. The dog's infatuation was put to-practical service by his master during the next few weeks, for that astute young gentleman, when unable to discover the whereabouts of his idol by peering and prowling, would take one of Blarney's silky ears in his hand and whisper, “Go, find her, boy,” which the clever animal promptly proceeded to do, usually successfully, though often the search would receive a check on the edge of the lake and be resumed after a run of a mile on the island.

Madame Nell and I soon discovered that we had a host of common friends in New York and Washington, and that an uncle on her mother's side (poor Dick Whitney, who was lost on the *Ville de Havre*) had been a classmate of mine at Harvard forty odd years before. These kindly young people were as good and affectionate to me as though I had been a relative, and the heart of a lonely old man went out to them gratefully and lovingly.

By the way, I am tempted to repeat a compliment that I overheard toward the end of the summer, because it was the pleasantest and heartiest I ever had paid to me, or rather about me. Charge it to the garrulity of age or simple conceit, but here it is:

I came up behind them one dark night on the piazza, just as Mrs. Northrop turned to her husband and said: “Do you know, Tom, dear, I think Dr. Zobel is the very nicest old man I ever knew; he has the head of a sage and the fresh, pure heart of a little child.”

"THERE WAS A HOP THAT FIRST EVENING."—P. 273.

There was a hop that first evening in the large drawing room of the hotel, and a little while before the music began I wandered in to find three or four small groups talking and laughing, among them Van Zandt and his sister. She made room for me on the sofa, and said I should be her attendant cavalier, as she did not intend to dance. We chatted a bit and then madame began a running commentary on the people as they entered.

“The Robinsons—papa, mamma and daughter. Papa looketh upon the wine when it is red. Mamma is a devout Catholic. Daughter openly defies both parents and, I am convinced, hath a devil. I have ventured to rename them 'Rum, Romanism and Rebellion.'”

“What De Quincy would call 'an overt act of alliteration,' Nell,” said Van Zandt, and added: “Who is the imposing-looking old girl leading the small, meek man?”

“Where? Oh! of course. The lion and the lamb. Mrs. Colter is literary, writes things, reads Browning understanding (happy woman!), quotes Greek to people that never harmed her, and herds the lamb, who never has any capers in his sauce, and who is, I am told, her third matrimonial venture.”

“A fulfillness of prophecy,” murmured Harry, “'And the lion and the lamb shall lie down together.'”

“Harry, you are incorrigible. The young man of peculiarly unwholesome appearance who has just sneaked in is, I am morally certain, Uriah Heep, though he says his name is Penrose. That [as a handsome old lady of large proportions came into the room] is Miss Eldridge. She is very nice, but is omnipresent, so we call her 'The Almighty,' Her escort is Mr. Hinton; he is the biggest, jolliest and—except my Tom—the bestnatured man here. Everyone calls him 'Jumbo' or 'Billy' Look out for him, Buz; he is another rival and determined to have the chromo at any price. There she is with 'Buttons' in tow, and the disconsolate 'Wafer' vainly endeavoring to console himself with his divinity's aunt.”

The young gentlemen were aptly named. The first, a handsome young West Pointer on furlough, in all the glory of cadet gray and a multitude of bell buttons; the other, a pleasant-faced fellow, surprisingly tall and thin. Nell had introduced Van Zandt and me to Miss Solander and her aunt shortly after dinner, and I had had a very pleasant chat with the stately, whitehaired old lady, who was so proud and fond of her exquisite niece. She was Mr. Solander's sister and the widow of Captain Dupont of the French Navy.

Several friends of Mrs. Northrup joined her, and Van Zandt excused himself and went to make one of the little group of men around Miss Solander, followed by a parting injunction from his sister to remember that benzine would remove paint spots if applied while they were fresh.

Beautiful as this flower-faced girl was at all times, by lamp light and in evening dress she was lovely beyond all power of words to express, and as I came to know her I found that her beauty was not alone in her superb coloring, in the perfect lines of her face and figure or in her exuberant health, but was in her life; for she was—and is—that rare, sweet thing, a womanly woman, brave, strong, gentle, generous, pure of heart and clean of thought, a lover of truth, a hater of meanness, with a mind broadened by travel and burnished by attrition; and she carried, moreover, a cloak of charity of such wide and ample fold that it fell lovingly over even the follies and frailties of those weaker ones of her own sex and was proof against the arrows of envy.

With old people and children she was a great favorite; the men were her enthusiastic admirers, and a good half dozen of them were helplessly, hopelessly, over head and ears in love with her; but a number of the young married women and girls professed strong disapproval of her, on similar grounds to those outlined by Mrs. Northrup on the steamer, though I had my private suspicions that, in some cases at least, they were a trifle jealous of the attention she received from the men, who, as is generally the case at summer resorts, were not overabundant. Mrs. Northrup's dislike was an honest one, for she firmly believed the girl was artificial, and having carefully avoided an intimacy knew but little of the lovely nature and bright mind that no one was better fitted to appreciated than she.

Besides, Madame Nell was a born matchmaker and wanted her adored brother to marry her particular friend and crony, Miss Carrie Belmont, a brighteyed, keen-witted, merry little soul, who took nothing seriously except medicine and had about as much fixedness of purpose as a month-old kitten. To a man like Van Zandt, who needed both the curb and spur of a mentality as strong and earnest as his own, she would have been about as valuable a helpmeet as was poor little Dora to David Copperfield. But Nell was fond of the pretty, clever little creature, felt sure (as our mothers and sisters, God bless 'em! always do) that her brother was thoroughly incapable of picking out the right kind of a wife, and weeks before he came had perceived in Miss Solander's marvelous loveliness a dangerous and powerful factor in the personal equations she wished

to make equal to each other, so that by the transposition of matrimony they should become one.

Of course this knowledge came to me gradually; but even that first evening, as Van Zandt and Miss Solander passed near us in the waltz, I could see that he was wonderfully taken with his fair partner. For the next few days he was more or less the victim of some little sisterly traps that were set with great tact and amused Northrup and me immensely. Then my young gentleman escaped and made great running, distancing “Buttons,” “The Wafer,” “Balaam's Ass,” and the rest of what Nell called the “fry,” and crowding Hinton closely for what each felt was his life's race for a prize that might be for neither of them. They were a nice, manly, generous pair of rivals, and I never saw either take an unfair advantage of the other. I remember one day I was fishing, when they both rushed down to their boats and started for the island at racing stroke. Just as they were abreast of me Van Zandt, who was leading, broke a rowlock, and Hinton forged ahead; but the moment he saw what had occurred he backed water, tossed Harry an extra rowlock, waited until he had put it in, and then away they went again.

Which was the favored one it was for some time difficult to decide, as the girl was evidently used to a great deal of attention, and accepted it gracefully and even gratefully; but yet somehow as though it was a matter of course. She took many things as matters of course, by the way, among others her beauty, of which she was as little vain as a flower is of its color or perfume, and she labored under the pleasant delusion that men liked her simply because she could dance and ride and row and shoot and play tennis. There was another thing she played beside tennis, and that was the banjo, and it seemed to me that her rich, flexible contralto, the liquid tingle of the banjo and the Spanish words of the song she loved best to sing, made a harmony as soft and sweet as the fragrant, moonlit nights of her Southern home.

Until I read the generous and intelligent praise of the banjo by the gifted pen of America's greatest writer of romance, I had been rather diffident of expressing my liking for this charming instrument, partly because it was rather impressed upon me by my parents, who were a little tinged with Puritanism, that it was low, and partly because a musical friend, whose opinion in matters harmonic I always deferred to, disliked it; but, under the rose, I thought it delicious, and many years ago I used to wander pretty often to a beer garden in New York, where an old darky named Horace touched the strings with a master's hand and drew from them the half sad, half merry, but wholly sweet melodies of his child-hearted race, which always struck some responsive chord in me that no other music ever did.

There was a good deal of musical talent in the three hotels that summer. Miss Solander, Miss Belmont, Hinton and Van Zandt were a capital quartet; Mrs. Robinson was an accomplished pianist and accompanist; a young girl from Troy sang Irish songs to a zither delightfully; “Buttons” gave us the lays of West Point, and “Balaam's Ass,” as Mrs. Northrup expressed it, “really brayed very melodiously.”

Van Zandt had one decided advantage over the other men in his wooing, for he had brought his own saddle horse with him, and as Miss Solander had hers, a beautiful and very fast bay mare, and was an enthusiastic horsewoman, riding nearly every day, wet or dry, he frequently managed to be her escort.

They asked me to go with them one morning for a long ride through the mountains, and as it was not impossible that we might see a deer or some birds Miss Viola took her repeating shotgun, a pretty and close-shooting little weapon with which she was very expert, and Van Zandt and I our Stevens rifles.

My mount was the best to be had in the village, and was a strong, slow animal, intended by nature to grace a plow.

It was a grand day, crisp and clear, and the first level stretch of road we came to my young companions decided to have a race. Away they went, Blarney and I at an increasing interval behind them. At a turn in the road, about a quarter of a mile ahead, Harry's big gray was leading the mare by a good length, and when they rejoined me Miss Solander acknowledged her defeat handsomely, but put in a saving clause for her pet by adding, “She runs her best when frightened. I don't think even your splendid gray could catch her if we saw a bear.”

Harry laughed pleasantly, said he imagined his horse, too, might develop unexpected speed under such circumstances, and we cantered on. A little before noon we left the main road and struck into a bridle path that led through a dense pine forest, utterly impassable by reason of fallen trees and underbush, except on the narrow trail. We had not gone far when our way seemed barred by a huge dead pine that had fallen slantingly across the path and rested on a great boulder on the other side. It was too high to jump near the roots without great danger and the triangular opening by the rock did not look high enough for a horse to go through. However, we dismounted and managed to get the animals through, though there was very little room to spare.

In about half a mile we came to the edge of the wood, and the trail widened out to ten or twelve feet, bordered by a dense second growth of ash. Perhaps a thousand yards farther on Blarney became excited over some fresh tracks in the sandy soil, which we found were those of a deer that had passed only a few minutes before, as was shown by a clump of fern that was slowly straightening its crushed and bent fronds by the side of the narrow road. Miss Solander and I halted, while Harry rode quietly on ahead after Blarney, who was acting rather queerly, I thought, following the deer track for a few feet, then pausing, with nose in the air and bristling back, to snuff the air and growl. Van Zandt spoke to him, and the dog went steadily and slowly forward. He was a clever beast and the only setter I ever saw that could hunt all kinds of game well. Miss Solander promptly emptied the magazine of her shotgun, and refilled it with wire cartridges loaded with “buck and ball.”

I was watching Van Zandt, who was a few hundred feet away, when there was a crashing noise in the brush, and midway between him and us a good-sized black bear stepped out on the trail. My horse made a buck jump that nearly unseated me and backed half his length into the bush. Bang! Bang! went Miss Viola's gun. The bear stumbled, gave a roar of pain and rage, and started for us. The mare plunged wildly, wheeled about sharply and flew back by the way we came. The brute I rode was paralyzed with terror and I could not budge him, nor did I dare to shoot for fear of hitting Van Zandt, and my position of course kept his rifle silent. But he took in the situation at a glance, fired in the air, gave a yell that a panther might have envied, and came toward us at a gallop.

THE CAUSE OF THE TROUBLE.

The bear turned to look at this new enemy, and rose promptly on his hind legs to receive him. I saw the gray swerve slightly, heard a savage “Jump, ——— you!” from Van Zandt, saw his spurs go home, and then the great horse rise to the leap and skim over the bear in a splendid arch. Blarney, who was just behind his master, was not so fortunate. He lit fairly on the bear, and was sadly scratched and bitten before he got away. Van Zandt shouted, “I must catch her before she gets to the fallen tree!” and went by me like a whirlwind. It was not much over a mile, she had a hundred yards and more the start of him, and the mare was going like the wind. I fired a shot as soon as the gray passed me, and the report seemed to rouse my horse, who, oblivious to spur and voice, had cowered shivering in the brush, for he shook himself, snorted, took a last look at the bear, which was preparing to join the procession, turned tail and fled, developing speed of which I would not have believed him capable.

It was a horrible ride, not on account of the bear, which might have been a mouse for all the thought I gave it, but because there, ahead of me, in that narrow road, a beautiful girl, just blossoming into splendid womanhood, was rushing to an awful, ghastly death, and a few cruel yards behind her the man that loved her and would so gladly have given his life for hers. Oh, how my heart ached for him, and how I wished the old man that was third in that terrible race might die instead of that sweet child-woman! Could he overtake her? He was spurring fiercely and the gray was doing his best; but though the gap between them was closing, it was closing slowly—and we had entered the wood. Yes, he was surely gaining now, sixty feet more and he would have her. But there was the tree, and he couldn't reach her in time. I covered my eyes with my hands and turned sick and faint. Then came back to me in a man's voice grown shrill with agony, one word, and following it crash! crash! in rapid succession, and again the sound of the hurrying hoof beats.

I opened my eyes. Was I blinded by my tears? There were no dreadful bundles under the tree. Then that word, with its fierce, imperious note of command, which had conveyed no meaning to me in that first awful moment, came through the porch of the outer ear, where it had lingered, into the brain, and I understood —“Jump!” He had taken the one chance left to them at the last moment, shrieked his order at her, and she had obeyed, lifting her mare to a leap that looked impossible. He had followed her, and they had cleared it safely, for I could see their heads over the fallen trunk. I checked my horse, dismounted, led him through the opening and galloped on again.

In a few moments I had the pleasure of seeing the gray range up alongside of the mare and Van Zandt seize her bridle. I joined them and found they were sound in life and limb. Harry was standing by the mare's head, quieting her, and somehow he had gotten possession of a little gauntleted hand and was looking at the girl with a world of love in his fine eyes. She was quite pale, but her face was steadfast and strong, and in it as she met Van Zandt's look frankly was the dawning of something that she was unaware of yet, something that, if she lived would crown her lover's life with happiness “sweet beyond compare”—and my old heart was glad for them both.

Neither Blarney nor the bear was in sight, and as I had hung on to my rifle half unconsciously I proposed going back to look for the dog, but they insisted on accompanying me, and Miss Solander showed her own gun in its carbine holster with the flap buttoned. I tell you it took nerve for a girl on a runaway horse to do

that bit of work. Well, we went cautiously back, Van Zandt holding a strap fastened to the mare's bridle, and I on ahead. Nothing in sight until we got out of the wood and had made a slight turn. Then we saw Blarney, very ragged and bloody, but with an air of proud ownership, sniffing around the dead body of the bear. We had some trouble in bringing up the horses, but managed it finally.

Everyone seemed to feel after that that Van Zandt would win and wear the violet. Even Mrs. Northrup was preparing to bow gracefully to the inevitable, when Ethel came on the scene in the rôle of “enfante terrible” and spoke her little piece.

It was a lovely summer afternoon. The next day, Monday, was Miss Viola's twenty-first birthday; her father was to arrive by the evening boat, and several of the young men had planned rowing and sailing races in her honor. Mr. and Mrs. Northrup, Miss Belmont, Hinton and I were chatting in a little summer house just by the edge of the lake, and a few feet away, Viola, Harry and Ethel were skipping flat stones over the water. In a pause in our talk, which had been of Byron, just after someone had quoted:

> She was his life,
> The ocean to the river of his thoughts,
> Which terminated all,

We were all looking at the trio outside and speculating probably upon the future of two of them, when we saw Ethel seize Miss Solander's hand, look up at her adoringly, and heard her say, in her childish pipes: “You're so pretty! Why does mamma called you 'the colored lady?' You're not a nigger, are you?”

The girl flushed painfully, but stooped, kissed the child and, looking straight at Mrs. Northrup, said very gently: “No, dear; and if mamma knew me better she would not think I was colored.” Then she turned, bowed slightly and walked rapidly up the beach. Nell burst into tears, Van Zandt muttered something that didn't sound like a prayer and tore after his lady love. Northrup was so startled and angry that, instead of comforting his wife, he gave her a little shake and exploded with: “It's too ——- ——————— bad! A nice mess you and the brat have made of things!” Then, as the ludicrous side of the affair appealed to his fun-loving nature: “To save time, I'll spank Ethel while you roll out the crust of a nice, re: “To save time, I'll spank Ethel while you roll out the crust of a nice, big humble pie.”

Hinton and Miss Belmont slunk off, and I was preparing to follow them, when the unhappy little woman sobbed out, “Oh, Doctor, please, please don't go! Stay and tell me what to do. Tom's so nasty—if you laugh, Tom dear, I'll kill you.” So I stayed, and while we were consulting what was best to do Van Zandt came quietly into the summer house, his face and tightly-closed lips ashen, and his eyes the eyes of a strong man in pain. Nell rushed at him, exclaiming: “My poor Harry, my darling brother! I am so sorry; try to forgive me!”

He put her away from him with no show of anger, but very coldly, and then, very evenly and in an emotionless, mechanical sort of way, he said: “I have asked Miss Solander to be my wife. She refused me. I hope you are satisfied. I give you my word of honor that I will never forgive you, nor speak to you, until she accepts your apology and my love—and that will be never,” he added, heavily, and half under his breath. There was no doubt that he meant it and would stick to it, and his sister, who knew he never broke his word, after one appealing look at him, threw herself in her husband's arms and sobbed miserably. I followed the boy and took an old man's privilege. He listened patiently and thanked me affectionately, but it was of no use. Then I tried to find Miss Viola, and came across Nell on the same quest; but no one saw her until the next afternoon.

Monday was cloudy and windy, a real gray day. The races were to begin at 3 o'clock, and the entire community was gathered on the shore of the lake. Both Miss Solander and Van Zandt were entered, and I knew their pride would make them show up. The first race was for ladies in Long Lake boats over a half mile course and return, six entries, a handicap of one hundred yards on Miss Solander and fifty on Mrs. Claggett. Viola beat it handsomely and then rowed directly across to the island, where she would have a good view of the sailing race, though I think her object was more to escape the crowd.

After an interval of a few minutes three canoes, manned by Hinton, Van Zandt and another man, came up to the starter's boat.

The canoes got away together, Van Zandt to leeward. They had gone perhaps a quarter of a mile when a squall from the opposite shore struck them, and the canoe with the violet pennant (Harry's) went over like a flash, the other two, with loose sheets, running before the wind. Mrs. Northrup screamed, and so did several other women; but Van Zandt was a capital swimmer, and I expected every moment to see him on the bottom of the canoe.

Half a dozen men started in rowboats, but one shot out from the island and fairly flew for the capsized craft. It was Viola, and we saw her, when she reached her goal, stand up, shake off her outer skirts and dive. I had a powerful glass, and when she came up I saw she had him and was trying to reach her boat, which was drifting away. She gave that up and struggled toward the canoe. They went down, and then the rescue boats hid them. It seemed an eternity before two boats pulled swiftly toward us. In the first was Van Zandt, a nasty cut on his head and unconscious, but breathing faintly. In the next, held in the arms of poor “Buttons,” whose tears were dropping on her lovely white face, was the sweet child-woman, all the wonderful rose tints gone from lip and cheek and in its place the sad, cold hue of death. There was no sign of vitality, and I was hopeless from the first; but we were still working over her when the steamer came in, and the next thing we knew there was a heart-broken cry and her father had her in his arms.

Was it the bitter agony and yearning love in that strong man's cry that called back the fleeing life, or was it the sudden jar of lifting her and the fierce clasp of her father's arms that started the stilled lungs? I do not know; but, physician though I am, I incline to the former solution. Whatever may have been the cause there was a faint flutter in pulse and breast, and we renewed our efforts. In half an hour she was breathing softly and the color was coming back to her bonny face. Her father carried her up to the hotel and her aunt and Mrs. Northrup got her to bed. She recovered rapidly, but Van Zandt was pretty ill for about a week, and positively refused to see his sister.

Well, I suppose it was officious and meddlesome in me, but one day when I knew where Violante was I took Nell's hand in my arm and brought them together. In a few minutes they were crying over each other in real womanly fashion, and I prowled off. In about ten minutes little Nell, her eyes shining with happiness, hunted me up and said, “I want you to take me to Harry.” She showed me in her hand a beautiful and curious ring, which I knew was the engagement ring of Miss Viola's mother. Harry was sitting in an easy chair, with his back to the door, when we entered, and, without turning his head, he asked, “Is that you, Doctor?”

I answered him, and then Nell stole up behind him, dropped the great ruby in his lap, and whispered, with a sob in her voice, “With my dear sister Violante's love.” Harry looked at the ring stupidly for an instant, then Nell came around in front of him, and he pulled her down into his arms without a word. And I stole away with wet eyes and a glad heart, and told the news to Tom and Carrie and that prince of good fellows, “Jumbo” Hinton.

That is about all. Mr. Solander gave his consent and something more substantial, and two months later I went to the wedding of “The Lady in Rouge.”

THE BREAKING OF WINTER, By Patience Stapleton

That's the fust funerel I've went to sence I was a gal, but that I drove to the graveyard."

"I dunno as that done the corp enny good."

"An' seems all to onc't I miss old Tige," muttered the first speaker half to herself.

It was snowing now, a fine mist sifting down on deep-drifted stone-walls and hard, shining roads, and the tinkle of sleigh-bells, as a far-away black line wound over the hill to the bleak graveyard, sounded musical and sweet in the muffled air. Two black figures in the dazzling white landscape left the traveled road and ploughed heavily along a lane leading to a grove of maples, cold and naked in the winter scene.

"They say Ann Kirk left a good prop'ty," said the first speaker, a woman of fifty, with sharp black eyes, red cheeks, few wrinkles and fewer gray hairs in the black waves under her pumpkin hood. She pulled her worn fur cape around her neck and took a new grasp on her shawl, pinning it tight. "Ann an' me used to take a sight of comfort driving old Tige."

The man, her companion, grunted and went sturdily ahead. He was enveloped in a big overcoat, a scarf wound around his neck and a moth-eaten fur cap pulled down over his ears. His blue eyes were watery from the cold, his nose and chin peaked and purple, and frost clung to the short gray beard about his mouth.

"Who'll git the prop'ty?" panted the woman. She held her gown up in front, disclosing a pair of blue socks drawn over her shoes.

"Relashuns, I s'pose."

"She was alius so savin', keepin' drip-pins for fryin', and sfellin' nearly every mite of butter they made; an' I've heered the Boston relashuns was extravagant. Her sister hed on a black silk to the funerel to ride to the grave in; I guess they are well-to-do."

"Dunno," gruffly.

Somehow then the woman remembered that glossy silk, and that she had never had one. Then this sister's husband, how attentive he was leading his wife out to the sleigh, and she had seen them walking arm-in-arm the past summer, when no man in Corinth ever offered his arm to his wife unless it were to a funeral and they

were first mourners. “Silas never give me his arm but the fust Sunday we were merried,” she thought; “bein' kind to wimmen wan't never the Loweirs way.” A sharp pain in her side made her catch her breath and stop a moment, but the man paid no heed to her distress. At the end of a meadow on a little rise looking down a long, shady lane, stood a gray old farm-house, to which age had given picturesqueness and beauty, and here Maria Lowell had lived the thirty years of her married life. She unlocked the door and went into the cold kitchen where the fire had died down. A lean cat came purring from under the table, and the old clock seemed to tick more cheerily now the mistress had returned.

“A buryin' on Christmas Eve, the minister said, and how sad it were, and I felt like tellin' him Ann an' me never knowed Christmas from enny other day, even to vittles, for turkeys fetched better prices then, an' we sold ourn.” She went into a frozen bedroom, for Corinth folks would have thought a man crazy to have a fire in a sleeping-room except in sickness; she folded her shawl and cape and laid them carefully on the feather bed, covered with its gay quilt, the fruit of her lonely hours. Mechanically she set about getting supper, stirring the fire, putting a pan of soda biscuits in to bake, and setting a dish of dried-apple sauce and a plate of ginger cookies on the table. “Berried on Chrismus Eve, but little she ever thought of it, nor me, and little of it Jimmy hed here to home.”

She looked at her biscuits, slammed the oven door, glanced cautiously around to see if Silas, who had gone to milk the cow, were coming; then drawing her thin lips tighter, went back into the cold bedroom. With ruthless hand tearing open an old wound, she unlocked a drawer in the old mahogany bureau and took out something rolled in a handkerchief—only a tiny vase, blue and gilt, woefully cheap, laughed at by the cultured, scorned by the children of today. She held it tenderly in her cold hand and brought back the memory that would never die. It was years and years ago in that very room, and a little child came in holding one chubby hand behind him, and he looked at her with her own bright eyes under his curly hair. “Muver, Jimmy's got a s'prise.” She remembered she told him crossly to go out of the cold room and not bother her. She remembered, too, that his lip quivered, the lip that had yet the baby curve. “It was a present, muver, like the minister sed. I got candy on the tree, but you didn't git nawthin', and I buyed you this with my berry money.” The poor little vase in that warm chubby hand—ay, she forgot nothing now; she told him he was silly to spend good money on trash, and flung the vase aside, but that grieved childish face came back always. Ah, it would never fade away, it had returned for a quarter of a century. “I never was used to young ones,” she said aloud, “nor kindness,” but that would not heal the wound; no self-apology could. She went hurriedly to the kitchen, for Silas was stamping the snow off his feet in the entry.

“I got fifty dollars for old Tige,” he said, as he poured his tea into his saucer to cool; “he was wuth it, the honest old creetur!”

The little black-eyed woman did not answer; she only tightened her lips. Over the mantel where the open fireplace had been bricked up, was a picture in a narrow black frame, a colored print of Washington on a fine white horse, and maidens strewing flowers in his pathway.

“When Tige was feelin' good,” continued Silas, “he'd a monstrous likeness to thet hoss in the pictur, monstrous! held his hed high an' pranced; done you good to see him in Bath when them hosses tried to parss him; you'd a thort he was a four-year-old! chock full of pride. The hackman sed he was a good 'un, but run down; I don't 'low to overfeed stock when they ain't wurkin'.”

“Ourn has the name of bein' half starved,” muttered the woman.

Silas looked at her in some surprise. “I ginerelly gits good prices for 'em all the same.”

“We ginerelly overreach every one!”

“Goin' to Ann's funerel hez sorter upset ye, M'ri. Lord, how old Tige would cavort when Jim would ride him; throw out his heels like a colt. I never told the hackman Tige was eighteen year old. I ain't over pertikler in a hoss trade, like everybody else. He wun't last long I calc'late now, for them hack horses is used hard, standin' out late nights in the cold an'——”

“Was the Wilkins place sold out ter-day?” said the woman hastily, with agonizing impatience to divert his thoughts to something else.

“Yes, it were,” chuckled Silas, handing his cup for more tea, “an' they'll have ter move ter Bosting. You was ginning me for bein' mean, how'd you like to be turned outer doors? Ef I do say it, there ain't no money due on my prop'ty, nor never was.”

“Who air you savin' it fur?” said Maria, quietly. She sat with downcast eyes tapping her spoon idly on her saucer; she had eaten nothing.

“Fur myself,” he growled, pushing his chair back. He lit a pipe and began to smoke, his feet at the oven door.

Outside it was quite dark, snow and night falling together in a dense black pall. Over the lonely roads drifted the snow, and no footfall marred it. Through drear, silent forests it sifted, sifted down, clung to cheery evergreens, and clasped shining summer trees that had no thought for winter woes; it was heaped high over the glazed brooks that sang, deep down, songs of summer time and gladness, like happy, good old folks whose hearts are ever young and joyous. Over the wide Kennebec, in the line of blue the ferry-boat kept open, the flakes dropped, dropped and made no blurr, like the cellar builders of temples and palaces, the rank and file, the millions of good, unknown dead, unmentioned in history or the Bible. The waves seething in the confined path crackled the false ice around the edges, leaped upon it in miniature breakers, and swirled far underneath with hoarse murmur. In the dark water something dark rose and fell with the tide. Was there a human being drifting to death in the icy sea? The speck made no outcry; it battled nobly with nature's mighty force. Surely and slowly the high wharfs and the lights of Bath faded; nearer grew the woods of Corinth, the ferry landing and the tavern-keeper's lamp.

“I heered suthin' on the ferry slip,” said a little old man in the tavern, holding his hand behind his ear.

“Nawthin', night's too black,” said the tavern-keeper; “you're alius a hearin' what no one else do, Beaman.”

No star nor human eye had seen the black speck on the wild water, and no hand lent it aid to land.

In ugly silence Silas smoked his pipe, while equally still, Maria washed the dishes. She stepped to throw the

dish-water outside the door and then she heard a sound. The night was so quiet a noise traveled miles. What was it, that steady smothered thud up the lane where so seldom a stranger came? Was it only the beating of her heart after all? She shut the door behind her and hurried out, wrapping her wet cold hands in her apron. Suddenly there came a long, joyful neigh!

“How on airth did that critter git home?” cried Silas, jumping to his feet.

Nearer, nearer, in a grand gallop, with tense muscles and quivering limbs, with upraised head and flying mane, with eager eyes, nearer, in great leaps thrusting time and distance far behind, came that apparition of the night.

“Oh, my God!” cried the woman wildly, “old Tige has come home—come home to this place, and there is one living thing that loves it!”

The light flared out from the open door. “How on airth did he git across the river?” said Silas, querulously. “An' how am I goin' to git him back in this weather?”

There he stood, the noble old horse that her boy had raised from a colt, had ridden, had given to her when he went away. “Mother,” her boy had said, “be good to old Tige. If ever father wants to sell him, don't you let him. I'd come back from my grave if the old horse was abused—the only thing I loved, that loved me in this place I cannot call a home. Remember he has been so faithful.”

Ay, he had been faithful, in long, hot summer days, in wide, weary fields, in breaking the stony soil for others' harvest, in bringing wood from the far forest, in every way of burden and work.

He stood quivering with cold, covered with ice, panting after his wild gallop; but he was home, poor brute mind! That old farm was his home: he had frolicked in its green fields as a colt, had carried a merryvoiced young master, had worked and rested in that old place; he might be ill-treated and starved, he did not grieve, he did not question, for it was home! He could not understand why this time the old master had not taken him away; never before had he been left in Bath. In his brute way he reasoned he had been forgotten, and when his chance came, leaped from the barn, running as horse never ran before, plunged off the wharf into the black waves, swam across and galloped to his home.

“If there is a God in Heaven, that horse shall not go back!” cried the woman fiercely; “if you take him from here again it shall be over my dead body! Ay, you may well look feared; for thirty years I have frozen my heart, even to my own son, and now the end's come. It needed that faithful brute to teach me; it needed that one poor creature that loved me and this place, to open the flood-gates. Let me pass, and I warn you to keep away from me. Women go mad in this lonely, starved life. Ay, you are a man, but I am stronger now than you ever were. I've been taught all my life to mind men, to be driven by them, and to-night is a rising of the weak. Put me in the asylum, as other wives are, but tonight my boy's horse shall be treated as never before.”

“But M'ri,” he said, trembling, “there, there now, let me git the lantern, you're white as a sheet! We'll keep him if you say so; why hadn't you told me afore?”

She flung him aside, lit the lantern and then ran up to an attic chamber under the eaves. “M'ri, you hain't goin' to kill yourself?” he quavered, waiting at the foot of the stairs. She was back in a moment, her arms full of blankets.

“What on airth!”

“Let me alone, Silas Lowell, these were my weddin' blankets. I've saved 'em thirty years in the cedar chist for this. They was too good for you and me; they air too poor fur my boy's horse.”

“But there's a good hoss blanket in the barn.”

“The law don't give you these; it mebbe gives you me, but these is mine.”

She flung by him, and he heard the barn door rattle back. He put on his coat and went miserably after her, “M'ri, here's yer shawl, you'll git yer death.” The barn lit by the lantern revealed two astonished oxen, a mild-eyed cow, a line of hens roosting on an old hayrack and Maria rubbing the frozen sides of the white horse. “Put yer shawl on, M'ri, you'll git yer death.”

“An' you'd lose my work, eh? Leave me, I say, I'm burning up; I never will be cold till I'm dead. I can die! there is death 'lowed us poor critters, an' coffins to pay fur, and grave lots.”

Silas picked up a piece of flannel and began to rub the horse. In ghastly quiet the two worked, the man patching the woman, and looking timorously at the axe in the corner. One woman in the neighborhood, living on a cross-road where no one ever came, had gone mad and jnur-dered her husband, but “M'ri” had always been so clear-headed! Then the woman went and began piling hay in the empty stall.

“You ain't goin' to use thet good hay fur beddin,' be ye, M'ri?” asked Silas in pathetic anxiety.

“I tell you let me be. Who has a better right to this? His labor cut it and hauled it; this is a time when the laborer shall git his hire.”

Silas went on rubbing, listening in painful silence to the click of the lock on the grain bin, and the swish of oats being poured into a trough.

“Don't give him too much, M'ri,” he pleaded humbly, “I don't mean ter be savin', but he'll eat hisself to death.”

“The first that ever did on this place,” laughed the woman wildly.

Then standing on the milking-stool she piled the blankets on the grateful horse, then led him to the stall where she stood and watched him eat. “I never see you so free 'round a hoss afore,” said Silas; “you used to be skeered of 'em, he might kick ye.”

“He wouldn't because he ain't a man,” she answered shrilly; “it's only men that gives blows for kindness!”

“Land of the living!” cried Silas, as a step sounded on the floor, and a queer figure came slowly into the glare of light by the lantern, a figure that had a Rembrandt effect in the shadow—an old man, lean and tall, shrouded in a long coat and bearing on his back a heavy basket.

“You can't be a human creetur, comin' here to-night,” said Maria; “mebbe you're the Santy Claus Jim used to tell on as the boys told him; no man in his senses would come to Sile Lowell's fur shelter.”

“M'ri's upsot,” said Silas meekly, taking the lantern with trembling hand; “I guess you've got off the road; the tavern's two mile down toward the river.”

“You've followed the right road,” said Maria; “you've come at a day of reck'nin'; everythin' in the house, the best, you shall have.”

She snatched the light from Silas and slammed the barn door, leaving Tige contentedly champing his oats, wondering if he was still dreaming, and if his wild swim had been a nightmare followed by a vision of plenty. In the kitchen Maria filled the stove, lit two lamps and began making new tea.

“Thet was a good strong drorin' we hed fur supper, M'ri,” said Silas, plaintively, keenly conscious of previous economies; “'pears to me you don't need no new.” She paid no heed to him, but set the table with the best dishes, the preserves—Silas noted with a groan—and then with quick, skillful hand began cutting generous slices of ham.

“I hope you're hungry, sir?” she asked eagerly.

“Wal, I be, marm,” said the stranger; “an' if it ain't no trouble, I'll set this ere basket nigh the stove, there's things in it as will spile. I be consederable hungry, ain't eat a bite sence yesterd'y.”

Silas's face grew longer and longer; he looked at the hamper hopefully. That might contain a peddler's outfit and “M'ri” could get paid that way.

“An' I hain't money nor nawthin' to pay fur my vittles 'less there was wood-sawin' to be done.”

“Wood's all sawed,” said Silas bitterly.

“I wouldn't take a cent,” went on Maria, with flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes. “Ann Kirk thet hed the name of bein' as mean as me, was berried to day, and folks that keered nawthin' fur her is a goin' to hev her money an' make it fly. They say 'round here no grass will ever grow on her grave, fur ev'ry blade will be blarsted by the curses of the poor.”

“M'ri, you a perfessed Christian!” cried Silas.

“There's good folks unperfessed,” interposed the stranger; “but I dunno but a near Christian is better nor a spendthrift one as fetches up at the poorhouse.”

“Right you air!” said Silas, almost affably feeling he had an advocate.

The stranger was tall and bony, with a thin, wrinkled face bronzed by wind and weather, with a goatee and mustache of pale brown hair, and a sparse growth of the same above a high bald forehead; his eyes were a faded brown, too, and curiously wistful in expression. His clothing was worn and poor, his hands work-hardened, and he stooped slightly. When the meal was ready he drew up to the table, Maria plying him with food.

“Would you rather have coffee?” she asked.

“Now you've got me, marm, but land! tea'll do.”

“I should think it would,” snarled Silas; but his grumbling was silenced in the grinding of the coffee mill. When the ap-appetizing odor floated from the stove, Silas sniffed it, and his stomach began to yearn. “You put in a solid cup full,” he muttered, trying to worry himself into refusing it.

“We want a lot,” laughed Maria.

“Set up an' eat,” called the stranger cheerily; “let's make a banquet; it's Chrismus Eve!”

“That ham do smell powerful good,” muttered Silas, unconsciously drawing his chair up to the table, where the stranger handed him a plate and passed the ham. Maria went on frying eggs, as if, thought her husband, “they warn't twenty-five cents a dozen,” and then ran down into the cellar, returning panting and good-humored with a pan of apples and a jug of cider; then into the pantry, bringing a tin box out of which she took a cake.

“That's pound cake, M'ri,” cried Silas, aghast, holding his knife and fork upraised in mute horror. She went on cutting thick slices, humming under her breath.

“Might I, marm,” asked the stranger, pleasantly, “put this slice of ham and cake and this cup of milk aside, to eat bymeby?”

“How many meals do you eat in a evening?” growled Silas, awestruck at such an appetite; “an' I want you to know this ain't no tavern.”

“Do eat a bite yourself, marm,” said the stranger, as Maria carried the filled plate to the cupboard. The impudence of a tramp actually asking the mistress of the house to eat her own food, thought Silas. “We've eat our supper,” he hurled at the stranger.

“I couldn't tech a mite,” said Maria, beginning to clear up, and as he was through eating, the stranger gallantly helped her while Silas smoked in speechless rage.

“I'm used to being handy,” explained the tramp. “I allus helped wife. She's bin dead these twenty years, leaving me a baby girl that I brought up.”

“You was good to her?” asked Maria wistfully; the stranger had such a kind voice and gentle ways.

“I done the best I could, marm.” Doubting his senses, Silas saw Maria bring out the haircloth rocking-chair with the bead tidy from the best front room. “Lemme carry it,” said the tramp politely. “Now set in't yerself, marin, an' be comfurble.” He took a wooden chair, tilted it back and picked up the cat. Maria, before she sat down, unmindful of Silas's bewildered stare, filled one of his pipes with his tobacco.

“I know you smoke, mister,” she smiled.

“Wal, I do,” answered the tramp, whiffing away in great comfort. “'Pears to me you're the biggest-hearted woman I ever see.”

She laughed bitterly. “There wan't a cluser woman in Corinth than me, an' folks'll tell you so. I turned my own son outer doors.”

“It was part my fault, Mri, an' you hush now,” pleaded Silas, forgiving even her giving his tobacco away if she would not bring out that family skeleton.

“I've heered you was cluse,” said the stranger, “an' thet you sent Jim off because he went to circuses in Bath, an' wore store clothes, an' wanted wages to pay for 'em.”

“All true,” said Maria, “an' he wanted to ride the horse, an' was mad at workin' him so hard.” She went on then, and told how the old animal had come home.

“An' me thinkin' the critter was a speerit,” said the stranger in a hushed voice. “Beat's all what a dumb brute knows!”

“I thought mebbe,” went on Maria, twisting her thin fingers, “as Jim might be comin' home this time. They says things happens curious when folks is goin' ter die——”

“Your good fur a good meny years, M'ri,” said Silas, pitifully.

“There's folks in this wurld,” said the stranger, his kindly face growing sad and careworn since the mother's eager words, “that ain't men enuff, an' comes to charity to the end——”

“That there be,” assented Silas.

“And as can't bring up their folks comfurble, nor keep 'em well an' happy, nor have a home as ain't berried under a mortgage they can't never clear off.”

“Ay, there's lots of 'em,” cried Silas, “an' Mis Lowell was a twitting me this very night of bein' mean.”

“An' this good home, an' the fields I passed thro', an' the lane where the old hoss come a gallopin' up behind me, is paid fur, no mortgage on a acre?”

“There never was on the Lowell prop'ty; they'll tell ye thet ennywhere,” said Silas.

“We uns in the South, where I come from,” said the stranger, shading his face with his bony hand, “ain't never forehanded somehow. My name is Dexter Brown, marm, an' I was alius misfortinat. I tell you, marm, one day when my creditors come an' took the cotton off my field, thet I'd plarnted and weeded and worked over in the brilin' sun, my wife says—an' she'd been patient and long-sufferin'—'Dex, I'm tired out; jest you bury me in a bit of ground that's paid fur, an' I'll lie in peace,' an' she died thet night.”

“Mebbe she never knowed what it were to scrimp an' save, an' do without, an never see nawthin', till all the good died in her,” muttered Maria.

“Part o' my debt was wines an' good vittles fur her, marm.”

“I'll warrant!” said Maria quickly, “an' she never wept over the graves of her dead children, an' heered their father complainin' of how much their sickness hed cost him. Oh, I tell you, there's them that reckons human agony by dollars an' cents, an' they're wus'n murderers!”

“M'ri!” cried Silas.

“Mebbe, marm, you are over-worrited ternight,” said the stranger softly; “wimmen is all feelin', God bless 'em! an' how yer son loved ye, a tellin' of yer bright eyes an' red cheeks——”

She turned to him with fierce eagerness. “He couldn't keer fur me, I wan't the kind. I don't mind me of hardly ever kissin' him. I worked him hard; I was cross an' stingy. He sed to me, 'There's houses that is never homes, mother.' I sneered an' blamed him for his little present.” She ran and brought the vase. “I've kept that, Mr. Brown, over twenty years, but when he give it to me, bought outer his poor little savin's, I scolded him. I never let him hev the boys here to pop corn or make candy; it was waste and litter. Oh, I know what he meant; this was never a home.”

“But he only spoke kind of ye alius.”

“Did you know Jim? Been gone this ten year, an' never a word.”

Silas, a queer shadow on his face, looked eagerly at Brown.

“I did know him,” slowly and cautiously—“he was a cowboy in Texas, as brave as the best.”

“He could ride,” cried Maria, “as part of a horse, an' Tige was the dead image of that Washington horse in the pictur, an' Jim used to say thet girl there in the blue gown was his girl—the one with the bouquet; an' I used to call him silly. I chilled all the fun he hed outer him, an' broken-speerited an' white-faced he drifted away from us, as far away as them in the graveyard, with the same weary look as they hed in goin'.”

“An' he took keer of much as a hundred cattle,” said Silas; “they has thet meny I've heerd, in Texas?”

“They has thousands; they loses hundreds by drought——”

“Wanter know?” cried Silas, his imagination refusing to grasp such awful loss.

“Wal, I knowed Jim, an' he got mer-ried——”

“Merried!” from both the old parents. “He did. He says, 'I wunt write the home-folks till I'm well off, for mother will worrit an' blame me, an' I hain't money, but Minnie an' I love each other, an' are satisfied with little.'”

“Minnie,” the mother repeated. “Was she pretty?”

“Woman all over you be, to ask thet, an' she was,” said Brown, sadly; “with dark eyes, sorter wistful, an' hair like crinkled sunshine, an' a laugh like a merry child, fur trouble slipped off her shoulders like water off a duck's back.”

“An' they got prosperous?” asked Silas uneasily.

“They was happy,” said Brown with gentle dignity; “they was alius happy, but they lived under a mortgage, an' it was drift from pillar to post, an' ups an' downs.

“An' they're poor now,” muttered Silas, visions of Jim and his family to support coming to him.

“Hush!” cried Maria. “Tell me, sir, was there children? Oh, the heart hunger I've had for the sound of a child's voice, the touch of baby hands. You an' me grandpa and grandma, Sile! an', my God! you think of money now.”

“Set calm,” pleaded Brown, “for I must hev courage to tell ye all.”

“An' they sent ye to tell us they was comin'?” asked Silas, judging of their prosperity from the shabby herald.

“They asked me to come, an' I swore it. There's a queer blight as creeps inter our country, which without thet might be like everlasting Paradise. Ourn is a land of summer an' flowers, but up here in this ice-bound region, the air is like water in runnin' brooks, it puts life an' health in ye.”

“There's the blight o' consumption here. We're foreordained to suffer all over this airth,” muttered the woman.

“But there it comes in waves of trouble—in awful haste—an' takes all at once, an' them that's well flees away and the sick dies alone. So the yellow fever come creepin' inter my home, fur Minnie was my child—the daughter I'd keered fur; an' fust the baby went from her arms, an' then little Silas (arter you, sir). Then Minnie sickened, an' her laugh is only an echo in my heart, for she died and was berried, the baby in her arms, and Jim was took next—an' he says” (only the ticking of the clock sounded now, never so loud before): “'I want you, dad,' (he called me dad) 'to go to my old home in Maine. I want you to tell my father I named my dead boy for him, and I thought of his frugal, saving life with pain, and yet I am proud that his name is respected as that of an honest man, whose word is his bond. I'll never go up the old lane again,' says Jim, 'nor see mother standing in the door with her bright eyes and red cheeks that I used to think was like winter apples. And the old horse, she said she'd care for, I won't see him again, nor hear the bells. In this land of summer I only long for winter, and dad, if I could hear those hoarse old jolly bells I'd die in peace. Queer, ain't it? And I remember some rides I took mother; she wan't afraid of the colt, and looked so pretty, a white hood over her dark hair. You go, dad, and say I was sorry, and I'd planned to come some day prosperous and happy, but it's never to be. Tell mother to think of me when she goes a Sunday afternoon to the buryin'-ground, as she used to with me, and by those little graves I fek her mother's heart beat for me, her living child, and I knew, though she said nothing, she cared for me.' He died tell-in' me this, marm, an' was berried by my girl, an' I think it was meant kind they went together, for both would a pined apart. So I've come all the way from Texas, trampin' for weary months, for I was poor, to give you Jim's words.”

“Dead! Jim dead!” cried Silas, in a queer, dazed way. “M'ri,” querulously, “you alius sed he was so helthy!”

She went to him and laid her hand on his bowed head.

“An' we've saved an' scrimped an' pinched fur strangers, M'ri, fur there ain't no Lowell to have the prop'ty, an' I meant it all fur Jim. When he was to come back he'd find he was prosperous, an' he'd think how I tried to make him so.”

“The Lord don't mean all dark clouds in this life,” said the stranger. “Out of that pestilence, that never touched her with its foul breath, came a child, with Minnie's face and laugh, but Jim's own eyes—a bit of mother an' father.”

The old people were looking at him with painful eagerness, dwelling on his every word.

“It was little May; named Maria, but we called her May for she was borned three year ago in that month; a tiny wee thing, an' I stood by their graves an' I hardened my heart. 'They drove her father out; they sha'n't crush her young life,' I said. 'I'll keep her.' But I knowed I couldn't. Poverty was grinding me, and with Jim's words directin' me, I brought her here.”

“Brought her here!” cried the poor woman.

“Ay! She's a brave little lass, an' I told her to lie quiet in the basket till I told her to come out, fur mebbe you wan't kind an' would send us both out, but I found your hearts ready fur her——”

With one spring Maria reached the basket and flung open the lid, disclosing a tiny child wrapped in a ragged shawl, sleeping peacefully in her cramped bed, but with tears on her long lashes, as if the waiting had tried her brave little soul.

“Jest as gritty,” said Brown, “an' so good to mind; poor lass!”

Maria lifted her out, and the child woke up, but did not cry at the strange face that smiled on her with such pathetic eagerness. “Oh, the kitty!” cried May. “I had a kitty once!” That familiar household object reconciled her at once. She ate the cake eagerly and drank the milk, insisting on feeding the ham to the cat.

“Him looks hungry,” she said.

“We've all been starved!” cried Maria, clasping the child to her heart.

Such a beautiful child, with her merry eyes and laugh and her golden curls, a strange blossom from a New England soil, yet part of her birthright was the land of flowers and sunshine. Somehow that pathetic picture of the past faded when the mother saw a blue and gilt vase in the baby's hand—Jim's baby's.

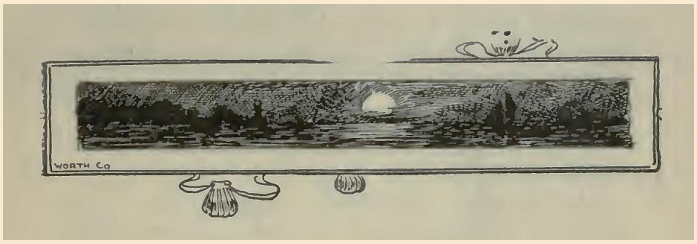
“It's pitty; fank you!” said the little creature. Then she got down to show her new dress and her shoes, and made excursions into the pantry, opening cupboard doors, but touching nothing, only exclaiming, “Dear me, how pitty!” at everything. Then she came back, and at Brown's request, with intense gravity, began a Spanish dance she had learned when they stopped at San Antonio, from watching the Mexican senoritas. She held up her little gown on one side and gravely made her steps while Dexter whistled. The fire leaped up and crackled loudly, as if it would join her, the cat purred, the tea-kettle sung from the back of the stove, and little snowflakes, themselves hurrying, skurrying in a merry dance, clung to the win dow-pane and called other little flakes to hasten and see such a pretty sight. Maria watched in breathless eagerness, and Silas, carried beyond himself, forgetting his scruples, cried out: “Wal, ef that don't beat all I ever see! Come here, you little chick!” holding out his silver watch.

With a final pirouette she finished with a grave little courtesy, then ran to Silas: “Is there birdie in der?” and he caught her up and kissed her.

When the old lane is shady in summertime, and golden-rod and daisies crowd the way, and raspberries climb the stonewall, and merry squirrels chatter and mock the red-breasted robins, and bees go humming through the ordorous air, there comes a big white horse that looks like Washington's in the picture; and how carefully he walks and bears himself, for he brings a little princess who has made the old house a home. Such a fairylike little thing, who from her sunshine makes everybody bright and happy, and Silas' grim old face is smiling as he leads the horse, and Maria, with her basket of berries, is helped over the wall by Dexter Brown, who always says he must go but never does, for they love him, and he and Silas work harmoniously together. And grandma's eyes are brighter than ever and her cheeks as red.

“What comfortable folks they air gittin' to be,” say the neighbors, “kinder livin', but I dunno but goin' a berryin' a hull arternoon is right down shiftless.”

Winter is over and forever gone from that household on the hill; the coming of gracious, smiling spring in a sweet child's presence has made eternal sunshine in those ice-bound hearts.



CYNTHY'S JOE, By Clara Sprague Ross

I DON'T think he'll be sech a fool as to p'int fer home the fust thing he does.” The speaker, a young man with a dull, coarse face and slouching air, knocked the ashes from a half-smoked cigar with his little finger, which was heavily ornamented with a large seal ring, and adjusted himself to a more comfortable position.

“I dun'no which p'int o' the compass he'd more naterally turn to,” observed another; an elderly man with a stoop in his shoulders, and a sharp, thin face that with all its petty shrewdness was not without its compensating feature—a large and kindly mouth. The third man in the little group was slowly walking back and forth on the platform that ran across the station, rolling and unrolling a small red flag which he held in his hands. He turned with a contemptuous “umph” to the young man, remarking as he did so, “'Tain't mostly fools as goes to prison. Joe Atherton prob'ly has as many friends in this section o' the kentry as some who hain't been away so much.”

“Joe was a good little boy,” pursued the old station-master; “he wuz allers kind to his mother. I never heard a word ag'in him till that city swell came down here fer the summer and raised blazes with the boy.”

“If there ain't the Squire!” exclaimed a hitherto silent member; “he's the last man as I should jedge would come to the deepo to welcome Joe Atherton.”

A stout, florid, pompous individual slowdy mounted the platform steps, wiping his forehead with a flaming red silk handkerchief, which he had taken from his well-worn straw hat. “Warm afternoon, friends,” he suggested, with an air of having vastly contributed to the information of the men, whose only apparent concern in life was an anxiety to find a shady corner within conversational distance of each other.

The Squire seated himself in the only chair of which the forlorn station boasted; he leaned back until his head was conveniently supported, and furtively glanced at a large old-fashioned watch which he drew from his vest pocket.

“Train's late this a'ternoon, Squar',” said the man with the red flag. “I reckon ye'll all hev to go home without seein' the show; 'tain't no ways sartin Joe'll come to-day. Parson Mayhew sed his time was up the fust week in September, but there's no tellin' the day as I knows on.”

A sustained, heavy rumble sounded in the distance. Each man straightened himself and turned his head to catch the first glimpse of the approaching engine, With a shriek and only a just perceptible lessening of its speed, the mighty train rushed by them without stopping, and was out of sight before the eager watchers regained the power of speech.

Five minutes later the red flag was in its place behind the door, its keeper turned the key and hastened to overtake his neighbor, who had reached the highway. Hearing the hurrying footsteps behind him, the man turned, saying triumphantly, “I'm right-down, glad he didn't come.”

“So be I; there's an express late this evenin' that might bring him down. I shall be here if Louisy's so as I kin leave her.”

“Wa'al,” returned the other, “I shan't be over ag'in to-night, but you jest tell Joe, fer me, to come right ta my house; he's welcome. Whatever he done as a boy, he's atoned fer in twenty years. I remember jest how white and sot his face was the day they took him away; he was only a boy then, he's a man now, gray-headed most likely; the Athertons turned gray early, and sorrow and sin are terrible helps to white hair.”

The old man's voice faltered a little; he drew the back of his hard, brown hand across his eyes. Something that neither of the men could have defined prompted them to shake hands at the “Corners”; they did so silently, and without looking up.

Joe came that night. The moon and the stars were the silent and only witnesses of the convict's return. It was just as Joe had hoped it might be; yet there was in the man's soul an awful sense of his loneliness and isolation The eager, wistful light faded out of his large blue eyes, the lines about his firm, tightly-drawn mouth deepened, the whole man took on an air of sullen defiance. Nobody cared for him, why should he care? He wondered if “Uncle Aaron,” as the boys used to call him, still kept the old station and signaled the trains. Alas! it was one of “Louisy's” bad nights; her husband could not leave her, and so Joe missed forever the cordial hand old Aaron would have offered him, and the kind message he was to give him, for his neighbor.

Sadly, wearily, Joe turned and walked toward the road, lying white and still in the moonlight. His head dropped lower and lower upon his breast; without lifting it he put out his hand, at length, and raised the latch of a dilapidated gate that opened into a deep, weed-entangled yard. His heart was throbbing wildly, a fierce, hot pain shot through his eyes. Could he ever look up? He knew the light of the home he was seeking had gone out in darkness years before. The only love in the world that would have met him without question or reproach was silent forever; but here was her home—his home once—the little white house with its green blinds and shady porch.

He must look up or his heart would burst. With a cry that rang loud and clear on the quiet night, he fell upon his face, his fingers clutching and tearing the long, coarse grass. There was no house—no home—only a mass of blackened timbers, a pile of ashes, the angle of a tumbling wall. Hardly knowing what he did, Joe crept into the shelter of the old stone wall. With his face buried in his hands he lived over again, in one short half-hour, the life he hoped he had put away when the prison doors closed behind him. All through the day there had struggled in his heart a faint, unreasoning faith that life might yet hold something fair for him; one ray of comfort, one word of kindness, and faith would have become a reality. As the man, at last lifted his pale, agonized face to the glittering sky above him he uttered no word of prayer or entreaty, but with the studied self-control that years of repression had taught him, he rose from the ground and walked slowly out of the yard and down the cheerless road again to the station. Life hereafter could mean nothing to him but a silent moving-on. Whenever or wherever he became known, men would shrink and turn away from him. There was no abiding-place, no home, no love for him in all God's mighty world. He accepted the facts; there was only one relief—somewhere, some time, a narrow bed would open for him and the green sod would shelter the man and his sin till eternity.

He hastily plucked a bit of golden-rod that nodded by the roadside; then taking a small, ragged book from a pocket just over his heart, he opened it and put the yellow spray between the leaves. As he did so a bit of paper fluttered to the ground. Joe stooped and picked it up. It was a letter he had promised to deliver from a fellow-prisoner to his mother in a distant town.

Not very far away an engine whistled at a crossing. A slowly moving freight and accommodation train pulled up at the depot a few moments later. Joe entered the dark, ill-smelling car at the rear and turned his face once more to the world.

It was in the early twilight of the next evening that Joe found himself in the hurry and confusion of a large manufacturing town. As he passed from the great depot into the brilliantly lighted street, he was bewildered for a moment and stood irresolute, with his hand shading his eyes. At one corner of the park that lay between the station and the next street, a man with a Punch-and-Judy theatre had drawn around him a crowd of men, women, and children. Joe mechanically directed his steps that way, and unconsciously became a part of the swaying, laughing audience.

“Hold me up once more, do Mariar, I can't see nothin',” begged a piping, childish voice at Joe's knee.

“I can't, Cynthy; my arms is most broke now holdin' of ye; ef you don't stop teasin' I'll never take ye nowheres again,” replied a tall, handsome girl, to whom the child was clinging.

Joe bent without a word, and picking up the small, ill-shaped morsel of human longing and curiosity, swung her upon his broad shoulder, where she sat watching the tiny puppets and listening to their shrill cries, oblivious of all else in the world. Once she looked down into the man's face with her great, dark, fiery eyes and said softly, “Oh, how good you are!” A shiver ran through Joe's frame; these were the first words that had been addressed to him since he said good-bye to the warden in that dreary corridor, which for this one moment had been forgotten. The little girl, without turning her eyes from the dancing figures before her, put one arm about Joe's neck and nestled a little closer to him. Joe could have stood forever. The tall, dark girl, however, had missed Cynthy's tiresome pulling at her skirts and the whining voice. She looked anxiously about and called “Cynthy! Cynthy! where are you? I'll be thankful if ever I gets you back to your grandmother.” The fretful words aroused Joe from his happy reverie; he hurriedly placed the child on the pavement, and in an instant was lost in the crowd.

He set out upon his quest the following morning and had no difficulty in finding the old woman he was seeking. At one of a dozen doors marking as many divisions of a long, low tenement building near the river, he had knocked, and the door had opened into a small, clean kitchen, where a bright fire burned in a tiny stove, and a row of scarlet geraniums in pots ornamented the front window. The woman who admitted him he recognized at once as the mother of the man in that far-away prison, whose last hold-upon love and goodness was the remembrance of the aged, wrinkled face so wonderfully like his own. In a corner behind the door there stood an old-fashioned trundle-bed. As Joe stepped into the room a child, perhaps ten years old, started up from it, exclaiming “That's the man, Granny; the man who put me on his shoulder, when Mariar was cross.

Come in! come in, man," she urged.

"Be still, Cynthy," retorted the grandmother, not unkindly, as she placed a chair for Joe, who was walking over to the little bed from which the child was evidently not able to rise alone. Two frail hands were outstretched to him, two great black eyes were raised to his full of unspoken gratitude. Joe took the soiled letter from its hiding-place and gave it to the woman without a word. She glanced at the scarcely legible characters, and went into an adjoining room, her impassive face working convulsively.

"What's the matter with Granny, was she crying? I never seen her cry before," said Cynthy. "Granny's had heaps o' trouble. I'm all thet's left of ten children and a half-dozen grandchildren. She says I'm the poorest of the lot, too, with the big bone thet's grow'd out on my back; it aches orful nights, and makes my feet so tired and shaky mornin's. Granny's kind o' queer; some days she just sets and looks into the fire fer hours without speakin', and it's so still I kin a'most hear my heart beat; and I think, and think, and never speak, neither, till Granny comes back and leans over me and kisses me; then it's all right ag'in, an' Granny makes a cup o' tea an' a bite o' toast and the sun comes in the winder, and I forget 'bout the pain, an' go out with Mariar, when she'll take me, like I did last night."

The child's white, pinched features flushed feverishly, her solemn, dusky eyes burned like coals. She had been resting her chin in her hands, and gazing up into Joe's face with a fascinated intensity. She fell back wearily upon the pillows as the door opened, and her grandmother returned and put her hand on Joe's shoulder, saying brokenly, "You've been very kind." The little clock on the shelf over the kitchen table ticked merrily, and the tea-kettle hummed, as if it would drown the ticking, while Joe and Cynthy's grandmother discussed and planned for the future.

It was finally settled that Joe should look for work in Danvers, and if he found it, his home should be with the old woman and Cynthy. He did not try to express the joy that surged over and through his heart, that rushed up into his brain, until his head was one mad whirl; but with a firm, quick step and a brave, calm look on his strong face, he went out to take his place in the busy, struggling world—a man among men.

Two months passed; months of toil, of anxiety, sometimes of fear; but Joe was so gladdened and comforted by Cynthy's childish love and confidence, that, little by little, he came out of the shadow that had threatened to blacken his life, into the sunshine and peace of a homely, self-sacrificing existence in "Riverside Row."

Cynthy's ideas of heaven were very vague, and not always satisfactory, even to herself, but she often wondered, since Joe came, if heaven ever began here and she was not tasting some of its minor delights. Of course, she did not put it in just this way; but Cynthy's heaven was a place where children walked and were never tired, where above all things they wore pretty clothes and had everything that was denied them on earth. Joe had realized so many of the child's wild dreams, had made possible so many longed-for or unattainable pleasures, had so brightened and changed her weary, painful life, that to Cynthy's eyes there was always about his head a halo as in the pictures of Granny's saints; goodness, kindness, generosity—love, were for her spelled with three letters, and read—Joe. Out of the hard-earned wages the man put into Granny's hand every Saturday night, there was always a little reserved for Cynthy. Her grandmother sometimes fretted or occasionally remonstrated; but Joe was firm. Alas! human life, like the never-resting earth, of which it is a part, swings out of the sunlight into the shadow, out of the daytime into the darkness through which the moon and the stars do not always shine.

One night, a bitter, stormy night in November, he was a little late in leaving his work. He had to pass, on his way out of the building, a knot of men who were talking in suppressed voices. They did not ask him to join them, but the words "prison-scab," "jail-bird", fell on his ever-alert ear. With a shudder he hurried on.

Granny was stooping over the trundle-bed in a vain attempt to quiet the child, who was tossing upon it, in pain and delirium. Cynthy had slipped upon a piece of ice a few days before, and now she was never free from the torturing, burning pain in her back. Sometimes it was in her head, too, and then with shrill, harsh cries, she begged for Joe, until Granny thanked God when the factory-whistle blew and she heard the man's quick, short step on the pavement. Joe warmed himself at the fire for a moment, then taking Cynthy in his tired arms, he walked slowly up and down the room. Through the long, dreary night he patiently carried the moaning child. If he attempted, never so carefully, to lay her down, she clung to him so wildly or cried so wearily that Joe could only soothe her and take lip the tiresome march again. Granny, thoroughly worn out, sat sleeping in her large chair. Cynthy grew more restless. Once she nearly sprang from Joe's arms, screaming, "Go way, Mariar; you're a hateful thing! I won't listen; 'tain't true; Joe is good," and dropping back heavily, she whispered, "I love you, Joe." She knew, then! Joe thought his heart would never throb again.

He listened for the early morning whistles. One by one they sounded on the clear, keen air, but never the one for which he waited. As soon as it was light, he peered through the ice-covered window at the tall chimneys just beyond the "Row." They rose grim and silent, but no smoke issued from them. The end had come. Joe knew a strike was on.

Sometime in the afternoon of that day Cynthy suffered herself to be placed on the small, white bed; but she was not willing Joe should leave her, and was quiet only when he held her feeble hand in his close grasp. No sound escaped the man's white lips. Only God and the angels watched his struggle with the powers of darkness. As night came on again, Cynthy sank into a heavy sleep, and Joe, released, took his hat and went out very softly.

He stopped after a long walk at the massive doors of a "West End" palace. He followed with downcast eyes the servant who answered his ring into a small but elegant reception-room, where he was told he might wait for the master of the house, the owner of the large manufactory where he was employed. Into the patient ear of this man, whom he had never seen before, Joe poured the story of his life. The sin, the shame, the agony of despair, his salvation through Cynthy.

"I will call my son," said the sympathizing old gentleman as Joe rose to go; "he is one of Danvers' best physicians. He will go with you and see what can be done for the little girl."

An hour later the two men were bending over the sick child. "She is very ill," said the young doctor, in reply ta Joe's mute, appealing face. "This stupor may end in death, or it may result in a sleep which will bring relief. You must be brave, my friend. A few hours to-night will decide. You may hope." Joe's weary limbs faltered

beneath him. He fell upon his knees breathing a wordless prayer that the child might be spared to bless and comfort hi& lonely, aching heart; while all unseen the Angel of Life hovered over the little bed.

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